Nathalia Brodskaïa

Impressionism

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IMPRESSIONISM

Nathalia Brodskaïa

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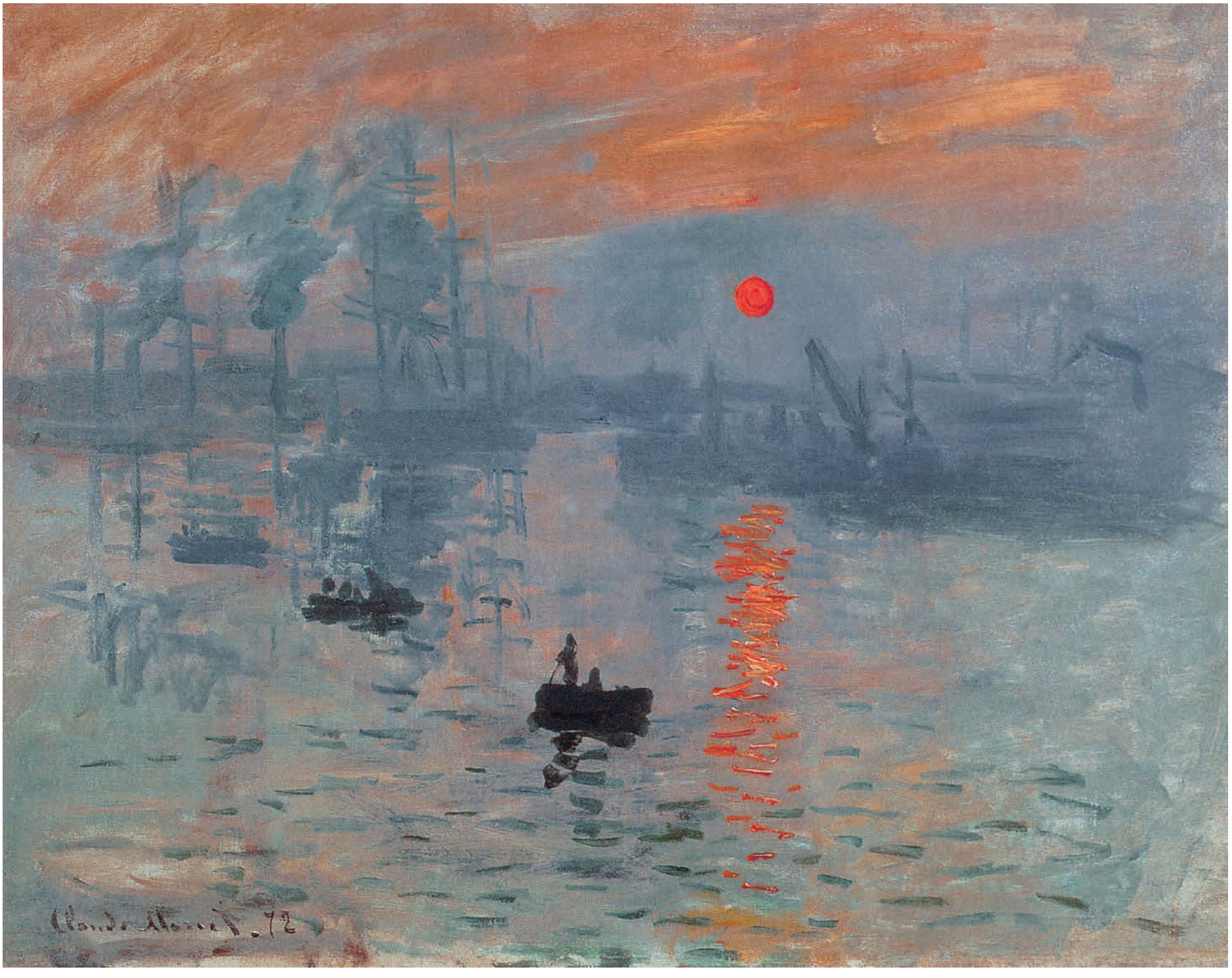

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Preface

Impression: Sunrise (p. 6) was the prescient title of one of Claude Monet's paintings shown in 1874 in the first exhibition of the Impressionists, or as they called themselves then, the *Société anonyme des artistes, peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs* (the Anonymous Society of Artist, Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers). Monet had gone painting in his childhood hometown of Le Havre to prepare for the event, eventually selecting his best Havre landscapes for display. Edmond Renoir, journalist brother of Renoir the painter, compiled the catalogue. He criticised Monet for the uniform titles of his works, for the painter had not come up with anything more interesting than *View of Le Havre*. Among these Havre landscapes was a canvas painted in the early morning depicting a blue fog that seemed to transform the shapes of yachts into ghostly apparitions. The painting also depicted smaller boats gliding over the water in black silhouette, and above the horizon the flat, orange disk of the sun, its first rays casting an orange path across the sea. It was more like a rapid study than a painting, a spontaneous sketch done in oils – what better way to seize the fleeting moment when sea and sky coalesce before the blinding light of day? *View of Le Havre* was obviously an inappropriate title for this particular painting, as Le Havre was nowhere to be seen. "Write *Impression,*" Monet told Edmond Renoir, and in that moment began the story of Impressionism.

On 25 April 1874, the art critic Louis Leroy published a satirical piece in the journal *Charivari* that described a visit to the exhibition by an official artist. As he moves from one painting to the next, the artist slowly goes insane. He mistakes the surface of a painting by Camille Pissarro, depicting a ploughed field, for shavings from an artist's palette carelessly deposited onto a soiled canvas. When looking at the painting he is unable to tell top from bottom, or one side from the other. He is horrified by Monet's landscape entitled *Boulevard des Capucines*. Indeed, in Leroy's satire, it is Monet's work that pushes the academician over the edge. Stopping in front of one of the Havre landscapes, he asks what *Impression, Sunrise* depicts. "Impression, of course," mutters the academician. "I said so myself, too, because I am so impressed, there must be some impression in here… and what freedom, what technical ease!" At which point he begins to dance a jig in front of the paintings, exclaiming: "Hey! Ho! I'm a walking impression, I'm an avenging palette knife" (*Charivari*, 25 April 1874). Leroy called his article, "The Exhibition of the Impressionists." With typical French finesse, he had adroitly coined a new word from the painting's title, a word so fitting that it was destined to remain forever in the vocabulary of the history of art.

Responding to questions from a journalist in 1880, Monet said: "I'm the one who came up with the word, or who at least, through a painting that I had exhibited, provided some reporter from *Le Figaro* the opportunity to write that scathing article. It was a big hit, as you know." (Lionello Venturi, *Les Archives de l'impressionnisme*, Paris, Durand-Ruel, 1939, vol. 2, p. 340).

Claude Monet,
Impression, Sunrise, 1873.
Oil on canvas, 48 x 63 cm.
Musée Marmottan, Paris.

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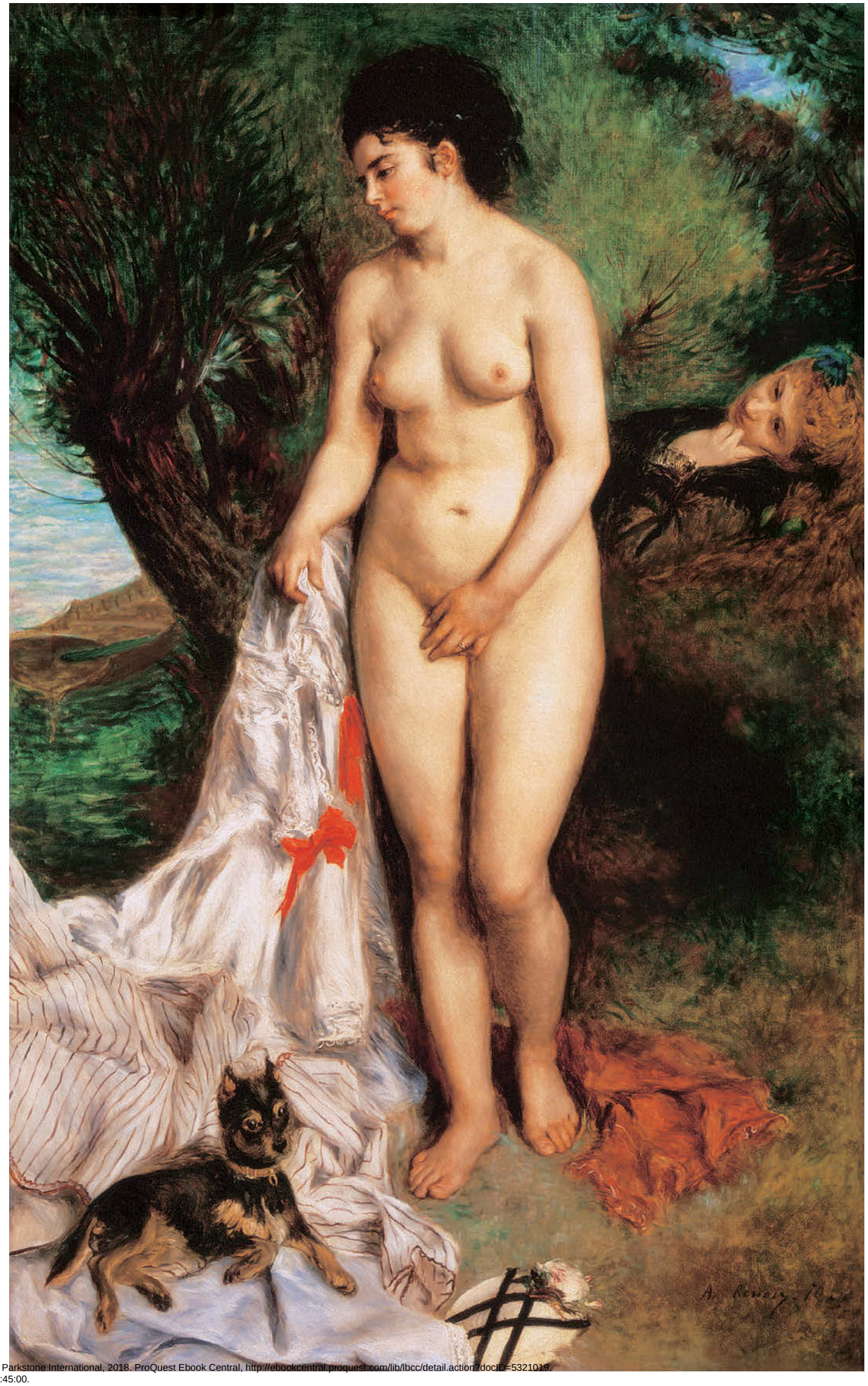

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The Impressionists and Academic Painting

The young men who would become the Impressionists formed a group in the early 1860s. Claude Monet, son of a Le Havre shopkeeper, Frédéric Bazille, son of a wealthy Montpellier family, Alfred Sisley, son of an English family living in France, and Pierre Auguste Renoir, son of a Parisian tailor had all come to study painting in the independent studio of Charles Gleyre, whom in their view was the only teacher who truly personified neo-classical painting.

Gleyre had just turned sixty when he met the future Impressionists. Born in Switzerland on the banks of Lake Léman, he had lived in France since childhood. After graduating from the Ecole des beaux-arts, Gleyre spent six years in Italy. Success in the Paris Salon made him famous and he taught in the studio established by the celebrated Salon painter, Hippolyte Delaroche. Taking themes from the Bible and antique mythology, Gleyre painted large-scale canvases composed with classical clarity. The formal qualities of his female nudes can only be compared to the work of the great Dominique Ingres. In Gleyre's independent studio, pupils received traditional training in neo-classical painting, but were free from the official requirements of the Ecole des beaux-arts.

Our best source of information regarding the future Impressionists' studies with Gleyre is none other than Renoir himself, in conversation with his son, the renowned filmmaker Jean Renoir. The elder Renoir described his teacher as a "powerful Swiss, bearded and near-sighted" and remembered Gleyre's Latin Quarter studio, on the left bank of the Seine, as "a big empty room packed with young men bent over their easels. Grey light spilled onto the model from a picture window facing north, according to the rules." (Jean Renoir, *Pierre Auguste Renoir, mon père*, Paris, Gallimard, 1981, p. 114). Gleyre's students could hardly be less alike. Young men from wealthy families who were playing at being artists came to the studio wearing jackets and black velvet berets. Monet derisively called these students "the grocers" on account of their narrow minds. The white house painter's coat that Renoir worked in was the butt of their jokes. But Renoir and his new friends paid them no heed. "He was there to learn how to draw figures," his son recalls. "As he covered his paper with strokes of charcoal, he was soon completely engrossed in the shape of a calf or the curve of a hand." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 114). Renoir and his friends took art school seriously, to such an extent that Gleyre was disconcerted by the extraordinary facility with which Renoir worked. Renoir mimicked his teacher's criticisms in a funny Swiss accent that the students used to make fun of him: "*Cheune homme, fous êdes drès atroit, drès toué, mais on tirait que fous beignez bour fous amuser*." (Young man, you are very talented and very gifted, but people say that you paint just for fun). As Jean Renoir tells it: "Obviously," my father replied, "if it wasn't any fun, I wouldn't paint!" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 119).

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Bather with a Griffon Dog, 1870.
Oil on canvas, 184 x 115 cm.
Museu de Arte, São Paulo.

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres,
The Bather, known as the *Valpinçon Bather*, 1808.
Oil on canvas, 146 x 97.5 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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Alfred Sisley,
Avenue of Chestnut Trees at La Celle-Saint-Cloud, 1867.
Oil on canvas, 95.5 x 122.2 cm.
Southampton City Art Gallery, Southampton.

All four artists burned with desire to grasp the principles of painting and neo-classical technique: after all, this was the reason that they had come to Gleyre's studio. They applied themselves to the study of the nude figure and successfully passed all their required exam competitions, receiving prizes for drawing, perspective, anatomy, and likeness. Each of the future Impressionists received Gleyre's praise on some occasion.

One day Renoir decided to impress his teacher by painting a nude according to all the rules, as he put it: "tan flesh emerging from bitumen black as night, backlighting caressing the shoulder, and the tortured look that accompanies stomach cramps." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 119). Gleyre was struck by Renoir's impertinence and his shock and indignation were not unwarranted: his student had proved that he was perfectly capable of painting as the teacher required, whereas all the other youths were bent on depicting their models "as they are in everyday life" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 120). Monet remembers the way Gleyre reacted to one of his own nudes: "Not bad," he exclaimed, "not bad at all,

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this business here. But it is too much about this particular model. You have a heavyset man. He has huge feet, which you depict as such. It's all very ugly. So remember young man, when we draw a figure, we must always keep in mind the antique. Nature, my friend, is a very admirable aspect of research, but it provides no interest." (François Daulte, *Frédéric Bazille et son temps*, Geneva, Pierre Cailler, 1952, p. 30).

To the future Impressionists, nature was exactly what interested them most. Renoir remembered what Frédéric Bazille had told him when they first met: "Large-scale classical compositions are over. The spectacle of everyday life is more fascinating." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 115). All of them preferred living nature and bristled at Gleyre's disdain for landscape. "Landscape to him was a decadent art," recalls one of Gleyre's students, "and the eminent status it had gained in contemporary art was an usurpation; he saw nothing in nature beyond frames and grounds, and in truth he never made use of nature except as an accessory, although his landscapes were always treated with as much care and

Claude Monet,
The Chailly Road through the Forest of Fontainebleau, 1865.
Oil on canvas, 97 x 130.5 cm.
Ordrupgaard, Copenhagen.

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consideration as the figures he was called upon to include." (F. Daulte, *op. cit.*, p. 30). Nevertheless, students in Gleyre's studio would be hard pressed to find any constraints to complain about. It is true that the program included the study of antique sculpture and the paintings of Raphael and Ingres at the Louvre. But in reality the students enjoyed complete freedom. They were acquiring indispensable knowledge of the technique and craft of painting, mastery of classical composition, precision in drawing, and beautiful paint handling, although later critics often rightly noted their lack of such achievements. Monet, Bazille, Renoir and Sisley abruptly left their teacher in 1863. Rumour had it that the studio was closing due to lack of funds and to Gleyre's illness. In the spring of 1863, Bazille wrote to his father: "Mr Gleyre is rather ill. Apparently the poor man's life is at stake. All his students are devastated, as he is so loved by those around him." (F. Daulte, *op. cit.*, p. 29).

Gleyre's illness was not the only reason the formal training of the Impressionists came to an end. In all likelihood they felt that they had learned everything their teacher was capable of teaching them during the time they had already spent in the studio. They were young and full of enthusiasm. Ideas about a new modern art made them want to get out of the studio as soon as possible to immerse themselves in real life and its vitality. On their way home from Gleyre's studio, Bazille, Monet, Sisley and Renoir stopped at the Closerie des Lilas, a café on the corner of boulevard Montparnasse and avenue de l'Observatoire, where they had long discussions about the future direction of painting. Bazille brought along his new friend, Camille Pissarro, who was a few years older than the others. The members of this small group called themselves the "intransigents" and together they dreamt of a new Renaissance.

Many years later, the elder Renoir spoke enthusiastically about this period to his son. "The intransigents wanted to put their immediate impressions on canvas, without any translation," writes Jean Renoir. "Official painting, imitating imitations of the masters, was dead. Renoir and his companions were bon vivants… Meetings of the intransigents were impassioned. They longed to share their discovery of the truth with the public. Ideas came from all sides and intermingled; opinions came thick and fast. One of them seriously suggested burning down the Louvre." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 120-121). Sisley apparently was the first to take his friends landscape painting in Fontainebleau forest. Now, instead of a model skilfully placed upon a pedestal, they had nature before them and the infinite variations of the shimmering foliage of trees constantly changing colour in the sunlight. "Our discovery of nature opened our eyes," said Renoir. (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 118). No doubt an equally important influence on their passion for nature was the public exhibition that same year (1863) of Edouard Manet's painting *Luncheon on the Grass* (p. 54-55). The painting astonished the future Impressionists, as well as critics and observers. Manet had begun to accomplish what they dreamt of: he had taken the first steps away from neo-classical painting and moved closer to modern life. Truth be told, "burning down the Louvre" was little more than a spontaneous expression bandied about in the heat of discussion, not a conviction. When asked if he had got anything out of Gleyre's neo-classical studio, the elder Renoir replied to his son: "A lot, in spite of the teachers. Having to copy the same *écorché* (anatomical study) ten times is excellent. It's boring, and if you weren't paying for it, you wouldn't be doing it. But to really learn, nothing beats the Louvre." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 112-113).

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
The Painter Jules Le Cœur in the Forest of Fontainebleau, 1866.
Oil on canvas, 106 x 80 cm.
Museu de Arte, São Paulo.

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Precursors

The intransigents knew how to learn from the Louvre. The museum offered a wealth of old masters from whom they could appropriate the same aspects of painting that they were exploring. Indeed, it was their second school. From the sixteenth-century Venetian masters and from Rubens they learned the beauty of pure colour. But the experience of their fellow French painters was perhaps closest to the Impressionists. Antoine Watteau, for example, caught their attention. His broken strokes of bright colour and ability to render nature's shimmering effects with a delicately nuanced palette made an important contribution to Impressionism, as did the expressive handling of Honoré Fragonard. These two painters had already distanced themselves from a lacquer-smooth paint surface in the eighteenth century. An attentive eye saw what an important a role form and brushwork played in their canvases. They showed that it was not only unnecessary to discreetly conceal brushwork, but that brushwork could be used to render movement and the changing effects of nature.

Painters born circa 1840 entered the field of art already armed with the notion that they could use subjects from everyday life, but in the early nineteenth century, France still had the most conservative attitude in Europe toward landscape painting. The classically composed landscape, although based on a study of details from nature, such as the observation of trees, leaves, and rocks, reigned over the annual Salon. The Dutch masters, however, had started painting the well-observed living nature of their country in the seventeenth century. In their small, modest canvases appeared various aspects of the real Holland: its vast sky, frozen canals, frost-covered trees, windmills, and charming little towns. They knew how to convey their country's humid atmosphere through nuanced tonalities. Their compositions contained neither classical scenes nor theatrical compositions. A flat river typically ran parallel to the edge of the canvas, creating the impression of a direct view onto nature. Elsewhere, the Venetian landscape painters of the eighteenth century gave us the specific landscape genre of the *veduta*. The works of Francesco Guardi, Antonio Canaletto, and Bernardo Bellotto have a theatrical beauty built upon the rules of the neo-classical school, but they depict real scenes taken from life; indeed, they were noted for such topographical detail that they have remained in the history of art as documentary evidence of towns long since destroyed. Moreover, the *vedute* depicted a light veil of humid mist above the Venetian lagoons and the particular limpid quality of the air over the riverbanks of the island of Elbe.

The future Impressionists also had a keen interest in painters whose work had yet to find its way into museums, such as the sketching club founded in England in the late eighteenth century. Its members, who worked directly from nature and specialised in light landscape sketches, included Richard Parkes Bonington, who died in 1828, at the age of twenty-six. Bonnington's watercolour landscapes had a novel limpidity and grace as well as the subtle sensation of the surrounding air. A large part of his life had been spent in France, where he studied with Gros and was close to Delacroix. Bonington depicted the landscapes of Normandy and the Ile-de-France, locations where all the

Eugène Delacroix,
Arab Saddling his Horse, 1855.
Oil on canvas, 56 x 47 cm.
The State Hermitage Museum,
St Petersburg.

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Impressionists would much later paint. The Impressionists were probably also familiar with the work of the English painter John Constable, from whom they may have learned how to appreciate the integrity of landscape and the expressive power of painterly brushwork. Constable's finished paintings retain the characteristics of their sketches and the fresh colour of studies done after nature. And the Impressionists surely knew the work of Joseph Mallord William Turner, acknowledged leader of the English landscape school for sixty years until 1851. Turner depicted atmospheric effects. Fog, the haze at sunset, steam billowing from a locomotive, or a simple cloud became motifs in and of themselves. His watercolour series entitled "Rivers of France" commenced a painterly ode to the Seine that the Impressionists would later take up, and included a landscape with Rouen Cathedral that was a predecessor of Monet's own Rouen Cathedral series.

Professors at the Ecole des beaux-arts in mid-nineteenth-century Paris were still teaching the historical landscape based on the ideal models created in seventeenth-century France by Nicolas Poussin and Claude Le Lorrain. The Impressionists, however, were not the first to rebel against clichéd themes and to stand up for truth in painting. Pierre Auguste Renoir told his son of a strange encounter he had in 1863 in Fontainebleau forest. For whatever reason, a group of young ruffians did not like the look of Renoir, who was painting directly from nature dressed in his painter's smock. With a single kick, one of them knocked the palette out of Renoir's hands and caused him to fall to the ground. The girls struck him with a parasol ('in my face, with the steel-tipped end; they could have put my eyes out!'). Suddenly, emerging from the bushes, a man appeared. He was about fifty years old, tall and strong, and he too was laden with painting paraphernalia. He also had a wooden leg and held a heavy cane in his hand. The newcomer dropped his things and rushed to the rescue of his young fellow painter. Swinging his cane and his wooden leg, he quickly scattered the attackers. My father was able to get up off the ground and join the fight… In no time the two painters had successfully stood their ground. Oblivious to the thanks coming from the person he had just saved, the one-legged man picked up the fallen canvas and looked at it attentively. "Not bad at all. You are gifted, very gifted…The two men sat down on the grass, and Renoir spoke of his life and modest ambitions. Eventually the stranger introduced himself. It was Diaz." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 82-83). Narcisse Diaz de la Peña belonged to a group of landscape painters known as the Barbizon school. The Barbizon painters came from a generation of artists born between the first and second decades of the nineteenth century. Almost fifty years separated them from the Impressionists. The Barbizon painters had been the first to paint landscapes after nature. It was only fitting that Renoir met Diaz in Fontainebleau forest.

The young painters of the Barbizon school were making traditional classicising landscapes, but by the 1830s this activity no longer satisfied them. The Parisian Théodore Rousseau had fallen in love with landscape in his youth while travelling throughout France with his father. According to his biographer: "One day, on his own and without telling anyone, he purchased paints and brushes and went to the hill of Montmartre, at the foot of the old church that carried the aerial telegraph tower, and there he began to paint what he saw before him: the monument, the cemetery, the trees, the walls, and terrain that rose up there. In a few days, he finished a solid detailed study with a very natural tonality. This was the sign of his vocation." (A. Sensier, *Théodore Rousseau*, Paris, 1872, p. 17).

John Constable,
Dedham Vale, 1802.
Oil on canvas, 43.5 x 34.4 cm.
Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

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Rousseau began painting "what he saw before him" in Normandy, in the mountains of the Auvergne, in Saint-Cloud, Sèvres, and Meudon. His first brush with fame was the Salon of 1833, well before the birth of the future Impressionists, when his *View on the Outskirts of Granville* (St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum) caused a sensation due to its focus on a mediocre, rustic motif. A contemporary critic wrote that this landscape "is among the most realistic and warmest in tone of anything the French School has ever produced." (A. Sensier, *op. cit.*, p. 38). Rousseau had discovered a sleepy little village called Barbizon at the entrance of the forest of Fontainebleau. There he was joined by his friend Jules Dupré and the aforementioned Spanish painter Narcisse Diaz de la Peña. Another of Rousseau's painter friends who often worked at Barbizon was Constant Troyon. In the late 1840s, Jean-François Millet, known for his paintings of the French peasantry, moved to Barbizon with his large family. Thus was born the group of landscape painters that came to be known as the Barbizon School. However, these landscape artists only executed studies in the forest and fields, from which they subsequently composed their paintings in the studio.

Claude Monet,
Houses of Parliament, Effect of Sunlight, 1903.
Oil on canvas, 81 x 92 cm.
Brooklyn Museum, New York.

Joseph Mallord William Turner,
Slave Ship (*Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On*), 1840.
Oil on canvas, 90.8 x 122.6 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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John Constable,
Golding Constable's Flower Garden, 1815.
Oil on canvas, 33 x 50.8 cm.
Museums and Galleries, Ipswich.

Charles-François Daubigny, who also sometimes worked at Barbizon, took the idea further than the others. He established himself at Auvers on the banks of the Oise and built a studio-barge he called the *Bottin*. Then the painter sailed the river, stopping wherever he wished to paint the motif directly before him. This working method enabled him to give up traditional composition and to base his colour on the observation of nature. Daubigny would later support the future Impressionists when he was a jury member of the Salon.

But Camille Corot was perhaps the closest to the Impressionists. He was living in the village of Ville d'Avray near Paris. With characteristic spontaneity, Corot painted the ponds near his house, the reflection in their water of weeping willows, and the shaded paths that led into the forest. Even if his landscapes evoked memories of Italy, Ville-d'Avray was recognisable. No one was more sensitive to nature than Corot. Within the range of a simple grey-green palette he produced the subtlest gradations of shadow and light. In Corot's painting, colour played a minor role; its luminosity created a misty, atmospheric effect and a sad, lyrical mood. All these characteristics gave his landscapes the quality of visual reality and movement to which the Impressionists aspired.

Among the eldest of the Impressionists' contemporaries were two masters who played a fundamental role in the elaboration of their idea of painting. They were Eugène Delacroix and Gustave Courbet.

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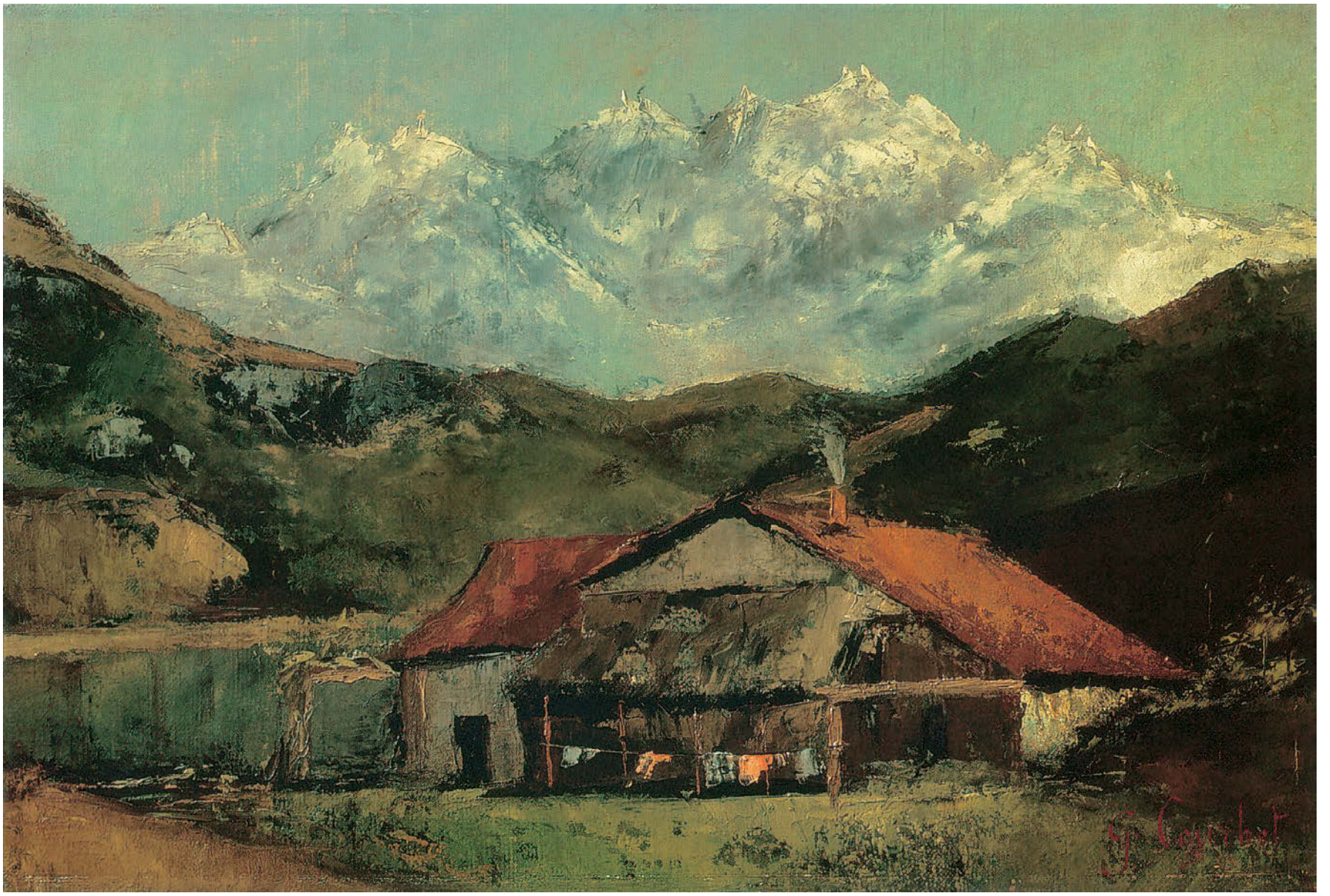

Delacroix showed them that colour could be used to paint shadows, that a colour changed in relation to the colour next to it, and that white did not exist in nature, as it is always tinged with reflections. Of course, the future Impressionists could have observed all that in certain works by the old masters from whom Delacroix had learned, such as Titian, Veronese, and Rubens, but Delacroix was a part of their own world and his painting still was creating controversy. The great battle between the Romantics and the Neo classicists was not over yet.

At one point Monet and Bazille even rented a studio near Delacroix's residence on place Fürstenberg where they could see him in his garden. Delacroix taught them to see the richness of colour in nature. As Bazille wrote to his parents about Delacroix: "You will not believe how I am learning to see in his paintings; one of these sessions is worth a month of work." (F. Daulte, *op. cit.*, p. 92).

The Impressionists also encountered the art of Gustave Courbet, the "realist" painting contemporary life and fighting the conventions of neo-classicism. Courbet often used a palette knife instead of a paint brush to lay thick strokes of paint on canvas, demonstrating a degree of freedom in paint handling that had never been seen before. Under all these influences, Impressionist painting was taking form, bit by bit.

Gustave Courbet,
A Hut in the Mountains, 1874-1876.
Oil on canvas, 33 x 49 cm.
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

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The First Impressionist Exhibition

The future Impressionists believed they were making a clean break with academic painting when they left Gleyre's studio. Eleven years later, they were developing a new concept of painting as they worked en plein-air (out-of-doors). The time had come to announce this concept, as well as their independence from official art, and to show their canvases in the context of their own exhibition. But organising such an event was not as easy as one might think.

Up until then, there was only one venue for exhibiting contemporary art in France: the Salon. Founded in the seventeenth century during the reign of Louis XIV by his prime minister Colbert, the exhibition was inaugurated in the Louvre's Salon carré, whence its name. Beginning in 1747, the Salon was held biennially in different locations. By the time the future Impressionists appeared on the stage of art, the Salon boasted a two hundred year history. Obviously every painter wanted to exhibit in the Salon, because it was the only way to become known and consequently, to be able to sell paintings. But it was hard to get admitted. A critical jury made up of teachers from the Ecole des beaux-arts selected the works for the exhibition. The Académie des Beaux-Arts (one of the five Academies of the Institut de France) picked the teachers for the jury from among its own members. Furthermore, the teachers in charge of selecting the Salon's paintings and sculptures would be choosing work made by the same artists they had as students. It was not unusual to see jury members haggling amongst themselves for the right to have the work of their own students admitted.

The Salon's precepts were extremely rigid and remained essentially unchanged throughout its entire existence. Traditional genres reigned and scenes taken from Greek mythology or the Bible were in accordance with the themes imposed on the Salon at its inception, only the individual scenes changed according to fashion. Portraiture retained its customary affected look and landscapes had to be "composed," in other words, conceived from the artist's imagination. Idealised nature, whether it concerned the female nude, portraiture, or landscape painting, was still a permanent condition of acceptance. The jury sought a high degree of professionalism in composition, drawing, anatomy, linear perspective, and pictorial technique. An irreproachably smooth surface, created with miniscule brushwork almost indiscernible to the eye, was the standard finish required for admission to the competition. There was no place in the Salon for the everyday reality young painters were anxious to explore. Finally, there was another, unformulated requirement: the paintings had to appeal to the potential buyers for whom they were made.

The victorious revolution at the end of the eighteenth century had given rise to a *nouveaux riches* class. Former boutique owners who had profited from the revolution built luxurious townhouses in Paris, bought jewels from the most expensive stores on the rue de la Paix, and bought no less expensive paintings

Alfred Sisley,
A Street Scene, 1872.
Oil on canvas, 65.4 x 46.2 cm.
Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Norfolk.

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Riders in the Bois de Boulogne, 1873.
Oil on canvas, 261 x 226 cm.
Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

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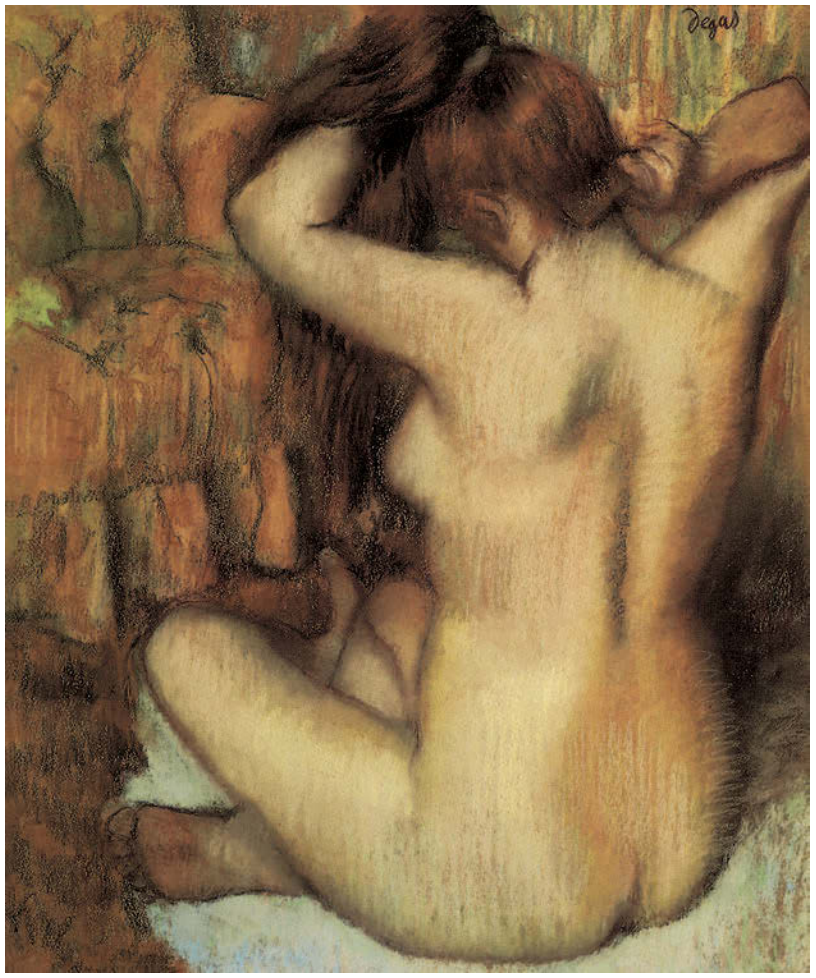
from celebrated Salon painters. The newly rich had questionable tastes that required some getting used to. It was precisely in the second half of the nineteenth century that the term "salon painter" became pejorative, implying a lack of principles and venality, the sort of eagerness to please that was indispensable for commercial success. The very fact of admission to the Salon demonstrated extreme professionalism on the part of the painter and under these circumstances changing his manner of painting and his style was no great feat. It was not unusual to find a neo-classical composition next to a canvas painted in the spirit of romanticism by the same artist. It was nevertheless a matter of honour for the Salon to retain its prestige and consequently, to maintain the spirit of classicism upon which it had been based up until then.



Edgar Degas,
Woman Combing her Hair, c. 1888-1890.
Pastel on paper, 78.7 x 66 cm.
Mr and Mrs A. Alfred Taubman Collection.

Gustave Courbet,
The Young Bather, 1866.
Oil on canvas, 130.2 x 97.2 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Salon favourites were derisively called *pompiers* (firemen). The contemporary meaning of this word has been lost over time. It may have stemmed from the constant presence of real firemen in the rooms of the Salon, or it may have been that the shiny headgear of the antique warriors in Salon paintings made one think of firemen. Or perhaps *pompier* was an echo of the French word for Pompei (*Pompéi*), as the Pompeian lifestyle was frequently depicted in the Salon's antique compositions. One story attributes the origin of the term to the famous phrase by the academician Gérôme, who said that it was easier to be an arsonist than a fireman. By that the honourable professor meant artists like himself fulfilled the difficult and noble duty of firemen, whereas those who one way or another attacked the foundations of the Salon and the classical ideal of art, naturally seemed like arsonists. The four former pupils of Gleyre, along with Pissarro who had joined them, consciously took the side of the arsonists.

Academic stagnation was already inspiring protest among artists. Even the great Ingres, an Academy member and professor of painting for whom the defence of classicism was a matter of honour, was saying that the Salon was perverting and suffocating the artist's sense of grandeur and beauty. Ingres saw that exhibiting in the Salon awakened an interest in financial gain, the desire to achieve recognition at any cost, and that the Salon itself was changing into a sales room by selling paintings in a market inundated with items for sale, instead of a place where art dominated commerce. Moreover, too many artists remained outside of the exhibit, either because of professional mediocrity or because they failed to meet the criteria of neo-classical painting. In 1855, only 2,000 out of 8,000 submissions were accepted for the Salon that coincided with the Universal Exposition. Gustave Courbet's best work was rejected, including his famous *Burial at Ornans*. Jury members felt that his artistic leanings would have a fatal effect on French art. Indeed, Courbet was the first serious arsonist: "I have studied the art of the ancients and moderns outside of the system and without taking part in it," he wrote in the catalogue to his individual exhibition. "I no more wanted to imitate the one than I wanted to copy the other…No! From a full awareness of tradition I simply wanted to draw the intelligent and independent feeling of my own individuality. To know how to, in order to be able to: such was my thinking. To be able to translate the values, ideas, and reality of my time, according to my own understanding; in short, to make a living art, that is my goal." (Charles Léger, *Courbet*, Paris, 1925, p. 62). This statement by Courbet could have just

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as easily been made by the Impressionists, because, although using somewhat different means, all these artists aspired to the same goal.

Each of the future Impressionists tried, with mixed results, to get into the Salon. In 1864, Pissarro and Renoir were lucky enough to be admitted, although Renoir's accepted painting, *Esmeralda*, was considered a critical failure for the artist, who destroyed it as soon as the Salon closed. In 1865, paintings by Pissarro, Renoir, and Monet were accepted.

In 1866, all the Impressionists – Monet, Bazille, Renoir, Sisley, and Pissarro – had their works accepted. Pissarro was singled out in a review of the Salon by the young literary figure Emile Zola. Zola wrote that nobody would talk about Pissarro because he was unknown and that nobody liked his painting because he strove for realism. It is possible that the future Impressionists sometimes got their paintings into the Salon

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simply because nobody knew who they were yet. The jury of 1867 was harsh towards the young painters: Bazille was rejected and among the many paintings submitted by Monet, only one was selected. Zola, who typically focused on young artists in his reviews (as if he had failed to notice the academic paintings), wrote to a friend that the jury, annoyed by his "Salon," had closed its doors to all those seeking new artistic paths. The Salon of 1868 nevertheless showed works by all five future Impressionists: Monet, Renoir, Bazille, Sisley and Pissarro. Even so, all of them felt an increasing desire to exhibit outside of the Salon.

The idea of having a separate exhibition probably came from Courbet's example. He was the first to actually do it. In 1865 he hastily set up a shelter on the Champs-Elysées near the Universal Exposition with a sign that read "Pavilion of Realism," sparking strong interest among the public. "People pay money to go to the theatre and concerts," said Courbet, "don't my paintings provide entertainment? I have never sought to live off the favour of governments…I only appeal to the public" (C. Léger, *op. cit.*, p. 57). The future Impressionists wanted to attract attention, too. Even when they found their way into the Salon, their modest little landscapes were only noticed by their close friends. In April 1867, Frédéric Bazille wrote to his parents: " We've decided to rent a large studio every year where we'll exhibit as many of our works as we want. We'll invite the painters we like to send paintings. Courbet, Corot, Diaz, Daubigny and many others…have promised to send us paintings and very much like our idea. With those painters, and Monet, who is the strongest of all, we're sure to succeed. You'll see, people are going to be talking about us." (F. Daulte, *op. cit.*, p. 58).

Organising an exhibition turned out to be no simple matter: it required money and contacts. One month later, Bazille wrote to his father: "I told you about the project of a few young men having an independent exhibit. After thoroughly exhausting our resources, we've succeeded in collecting a sum of two thousand five hundred francs, which is insufficient. We're thus forced to give up on what we wanted to do. We must return to the bosom of officialdom, which never nourished us and which renounces us." (F. Daulte, *op. cit.*, p. 58). In the spring of 1867, Courbet and Edouard Manet each had their own solo exhibitions, after the Salon's jury refused the paintings that they wanted to display there. Inspired by these examples, the future Impressionists never abandoned the idea of an independent exhibition, but left it to slowly ripen as they continued to work.

Friends of the artists worried about the consequences of such an exhibit. The famous critic Théodore Duret advised them to continue seeking success at the Salon. He felt that it would be impossible for them to achieve fame through group exhibits: the public largely ignored such exhibits, which were only attended by the artists and the admirers who already knew them. Duret suggested that they select their most finished works for the Salon, works with a subject, traditional composition, and colour that was not too pure: in short, that they find a compromise with official art. He thought the only way they could cause a stir and attract the attention of the public and critics was at the Salon. Some of the future Impressionists did endeavour to compromise. In 1872, Renoir painted a huge canvas entitled, *Riders in the Bois de Boulogne* (p. 23), which claimed the status of an elevated society portrait. The jury rejected the painting and Renoir displayed it in the Salon des Refusés, which had reopened in 1863. When the time came to organise the first Impressionist exhibit, Bazille was no longer with the group, having died in 1870 in the Franco-German war, so the bold and determined Claude Monet assumed leadership of the young painters. In his opinion they had to create a sensation and achieve success through an independent exhibition, and the others agreed with him.

Paul Cézanne,
Road at Pontoise
(Close to Mathurins), 1875-1877.
Oil on canvas, 58 x 71 cm.
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

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Exhibiting on their own nevertheless was a little frightening and they tried to invite as many of their friends as possible. In the end, the group of artists exhibiting turned out to be a varied bunch. In addition to a few adherents of the new painting, others joined in who painted in a far different style. Edgar Degas, who joined the group at this moment, proved to be especially active when it came to recruiting participants for the exhibition. He succeeded in attracting his friends, the sculptor Lepic and the engraver de Nittis, both very popular Salon artists. Degas also actively tried to persuade top society painter James Tissot and his friend Legros (who was living in London) to join their cause, but was unsuccessful. At the invitation of Pissarro, they were joined by an employee of the Orleans railroad company who was painting plein-air landscapes named Armand Guillaumin. Paul Cézanne travelled to the exhibit from his native town of Aix-en-Provence, also at Pissarro's invitation. The young Cézanne had broken with official painting in his earliest works, but he no longer shared the Impressionists' outlook on art. His participation may have aroused the concern of Edouard Manet, who definitely had been invited. According to his contemporaries, Manet said that he would never exhibit alongside Cézanne. But Manet may have simply preferred a different path. According to Monet, Manet encouraged Monet and Renoir to continue in their attempts to conquer the Salon. Manet found the Salon to be the best battlefield. In Degas's opinion, Manet was prevented from joining them because of vanity. "The realist movement doesn't need to fight with others," Degas said. "It is, it exists, and it must stand alone. A realist salon is needed. Manet did not understand that. I believe it was due much more to vanity than to intelligence." (*Manet*, Paris 1983, Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, p. 29). In the end, neither Manet, nor his best friend, Henri Fantin-Latour exhibited alongside the young artists. The idea of an independent exhibition also frightened Corot, and although he liked the painting of the future Impressionists, he discouraged the young landscape painter Antoine Guillemet from participating. But Corot was unsuccessful in dissuading the courageous Berthe Morisot, a student of both Corot and Manet, whom at that moment joined the future Impressionists.

Finding a location for the exhibit was a difficult problem to solve. It was risky to rent a space to young painters who were not only totally unknown, but who dared challenge the official Salon. "For some time we were automatically rejected by the designated jury, my friends and I," Claude Monet later remembered. "What were we to do? Just painting wasn't enough, we had to sell paintings, we had to live. The dealers wouldn't touch us. Still, we had to exhibit. But where?" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 340). An unexpected solution was found. "Nadar, the great Nadar with the heart of gold, rented us the space," recalled Monet. (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 340).

Nadar was the pseudonym of Gaspard Félix Tournachon, a journalist, writer, draughtsman, and caricaturist. According to a nineteenth-century historian, Nadar was equally well-known in London and Paris, Australia and Europe. A distinguished photographer, he made photographic portraits of his famous contemporaries, including Alexandre Dumas, George Sand, Charles Baudelaire, Eugène Delacroix, Honoré Daumier, Gustave Doré, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Charles Gounod, Richard Wagner, and Sarah Bernhardt, among many others. But this was not his only claim to fame. He was also a fearless aeronaut. During the Franco-German war, Nadar travelled by balloon over German lines to deliver mail from besieged Paris and it was Nadar in his balloon who got the French war minister, Léon Gambetta, out of the capital in 1871. Nadar was the first person to capture a birds-eye-view of Paris by photographing from the top of an aerostat. He was also the first to photograph the catacombs of Paris, which had opened in the mid-

Claude Monet,
The Port Coton Pyramids, 1886.
Oil on canvas, 65.5 x 65.5 cm.
Rau Collection, Cologne.

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nineteenth century. The second-floor photography studio that he turned over to the future Impressionists, was located in the very heart of Paris, at 35, boulevard des Capucines.

It was unlike the immense galleries that normally housed the Salon exhibitions. “The Salons, with walls covered in dark red wool, are extremely favourable to paintings,” wrote the critic Philippe Burty. “They [the paintings] are side-lit by natural light, as in apartments. They are all separated, which sets them off advantageously.” (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 288). Canvases of modest dimensions, lost in midst of the Salon’s huge academic paintings, in Nadar’s studio found the optimal conditions for the “free expression of individual talents.” (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 287).

One hundred and sixty-five paintings were assembled for the exhibit, the work of thirty rather dissimilar artists. Edgar Degas, Berthe Morisot, and Paul Cézanne exhibited alongside the four Gleyre pupils. The following artists were also represented: the engraver Félix Braquemont; a friend of Edouard Manet named Zacharie Astruc; Claude Monet’s oldest friend, Eugène Boudin, landscape painter of Le Havre; and Degas’s friend, the sculptor and engraver Ludovic-Napoléon Lepic. Additionally, the extremely fashionable Joseph de Nittis gave in to the exhortations of Degas. The names of the other participants in

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the first Impressionist exhibition meant little to their contemporaries and have not remained in the history or art. Degas suggested they call their association "Capucin," after the name of the boulevard, and because it was an unprovocative word that could not be taken politically or assumed to be hostile to the Salon. Eventually they adopted the name *Société anonyme des artistes, peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc.* (The Anonymous Society of Artist, Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers). In the words of Philippe Burty: "Along with their quite obvious individual intentions, the group that thus presented itself for review held a common artistic goal: in technique, to reproduce the broad atmospheric effects of outdoor light; in sentiment, to convey the clarity of the immediate sensation." (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 288). In fact, only a few of the exhibiting artists expressed both these qualities in their painting: they are the painters that have remained in the history of art under the name of Impressionists.

The term Impressionism not only designates a trend in French art, but also a new stage in the development of European painting. It marked the end of the neo-classical period that had begun during the Renaissance. The Impressionists did not entirely break with the theories of Leonardo da Vinci and the rules according to which all European academies had conceived their paintings for over three centuries. All the Impressionists had more or less followed the lessons of their old-school professors. Each of them had their preferred old masters. But for the Impressionists, the essential thing had changed: their vision of the world and their concept of painting. The Impressionists cast doubt on painting's literary nature, the necessity of always having to base a painting on a story, and consequently, its link to historical and religious subjects. They chose the genre of landscape because it only referred to nature and nearly all the Impressionists started their artistic itinerary with the landscape. It was a genre that appealed to observation and observation alone, rather than to the imagination, and from observation came the artist's new view of nature, the logical consequence of all his prior pictorial experience: it was more important to paint what one saw, rather than how one was taught – that was a fact! It was impossible to see the workings of nature within the confines of the studio, so the Impressionists took to the outdoors and set up their easels in fields and forests. The close observation of nature had a power until then undreamt of. If the natural landscape was incompatible with the traditional concept of composition and perspective, then artists had to reject academic rules and obey nature. If traditional pictorial technique stood in the way of conveying the truths artists discovered in nature, then this technique had to be changed. A new genre of painting appeared in the works of the Impressionists that lacked traditional finish and often resembled a rapid oil sketch. But the Impressionists still lacked a new aesthetic theory that could replace tradition. Their one, firm conviction was that they could employ any means to arrive at truth in art. "These daredevils assumed that the work of the artist could be done without professing or practising a religious respect of academic theories and professional practices," wrote one critic, three years after the first Impressionist exhibition in 1877. "To those who ask them to formulate a program, they cynically reply that they have none. They are happy to give the public the impressions of their hearts and minds, sincerely, naively, without retouching." (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 330).

Camille Pissarro,
Portrait of Cézanne, 1874.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 59.7 cm.
Laurence Graff Collection.

Frédéric Bazille,
Pierre Auguste Renoir, 1867.
Oil on canvas, 62 x 51cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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Edouard Manet (1832-1883)

"He was greater than we thought he was"

(Edgar Degas)

The art of Manet was one of the most important aesthetic factors contributing to the emergence of Impressionism. Although he was only twelve years older than Monet, Bazille, Renoir, and Sisely, those painters considered him a master. "Manet was as important to us as Cimabue and Giotto were for the painters of the Italian Renaissance," Renoir told his son (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 117). The originality of Manet's painting and his independence from academic canons opened new creative horizons for the Impressionists.

Manet's biography reads like that of many artists: his wealthy family of the Paris bourgeoisie wanted their son to be a lawyer, not an artist-painter. As a compromise, it was decided Manet would become a sailor. After failing the entrance exams for the Naval Academy, he boarded a sailing ship called the "Havre and Guadeloupe" as a sixteen-year-old apprentice and set off across the Atlantic. The romantic voyage to Rio de Janeiro only intensified Manet's desire to devote himself to art. Returning to Le Havre in 1849, he nevertheless tried again to get into the Naval Academy, but (luckily for him) failed a second time. In 1850, with his school friend Antonin Proust, Manet entered the studio of Thomas Couture.

Couture was still participating in the Salon and made a name for himself in 1847 with a huge canvas called *The Romans of the Decadence* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay). The teaching methods of his studio were considered innovative for his day. As a pupil, Manet was probably easily taught in the beginning, but he quickly became disillusioned. "I don't know why I'm here," he said to Antonin Proust in 1850, his first year with Couture. "Everything before our eyes is ridiculous. The light is wrong, the shadows are wrong. When I enter the studio I feel like I'm entering a tomb. I know we can't make a model undress in the street. But there are fields and, at least in the summer, we could do studies of the nude in the country, since the nude appears to be the first and last word in art." (Antonin Proust, "Edouard Manet. Souvenirs," *La Revue Blanche*, 1897, p. 126). Manet nevertheless spent six years in Couture's studio and the influence of Couture's solid training is consequently notable in many of Manet's paintings. The details of their student-teacher relationship are unknown to us, but Couture probably recognised Manet's brilliant individuality, even if it was inconsistent with his own idea of art: one day while looking at Manet's work, Couture reputedly told his pupil that it looked like he wanted to become the Daumier of his time.

Manet constantly copied the old masters and demonstrated a wide variety of interests at the same time he was training in Couture's studio. During trips to European cities he copied paintings in museums, including Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum and probably the museums of Kassel, Dresden, Prague, Vienna, Munich, Florence, and Rome. He was very interested in the nude, in his own words, "the first and last word in art." In 1852 he copied Boucher's *Diana Leaving the Bath* in the Louvre and in 1853 he copied Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, also in the Louvre. Manet was probably formulating the idea for his own variation on the classical nude, his future *Olympia* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris) at this time. But from the

Edouard Manet,
Self-Portrait with a Palette, 1879.
Oil on canvas, 83 x 67 cm.
Private collection.

Edouard Manet,
Olympia, 1863.
Oil on canvas, 130.5 x 190 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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outset what interested him most was colour, and his favourite old masters represented the school of colour: Titian, Rubens, and Velázquez. The Louvre was also where Manet often made new acquaintances. It was there that in 1857 he met Henri Fantin-Latour and they later became friends. In 1859, while copying Velázquez's *Infanta Margarita* directly onto a copper plate, a painter his own age stopped behind him. It was Degas. "You have the audacity to engrave like that, without any preliminary drawing, I wouldn't dare do it like that!" he exclaimed. (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 506).

Manet also had a role model among his living contemporaries: Eugène Delacroix. Antonin Proust remembered Manet returning from a visit to the Luxembourg museum exclaiming, "There's a masterpiece in the Luxembourg: *The Barque of Dante*. If we go see Delacroix, we'll make it the pretext of our visit to ask him for permission to copy *The Barque*." (A. Proust, *op. cit.*, p. 129). They polished-up on their plan and were received by Delacroix, who gave them a piece of advice that Manet could truly appreciate, as Proust remembered it: "One must look at Rubens, be inspired by Rubens, copy Rubens, Rubens was god." (A. Proust, *op. cit.*, p. 129). According to Proust, Delacroix gave them a rather cool reception, but the older artist seemed to warm before Manet's paintings. When critics attacked Manet's painting *Music in the Tuileries Gardens* (p. 38), Delacroix said that he regretted "being unable to come to this man's defence." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 126). The year was 1863, shortly before Delacroix's death and during Manet's exhibit at the Martinet gallery. Manet attended Delacroix's funeral with Charles Baudelaire. One year later, Manet's friend, the talented portraitist Henri Fantin-Latour, painted a large canvas called *Homage to Delacroix* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), which depicts Manet at age thirty among Delacroix's friends and admirers in front of a portrait of the great Romantic. Manet appears just as his contemporaries described him: "A blond with a silky beard… grey eyes, and a straight nose with mobile nostrils." Clearly the point of the painting, with Manet occupying such a significant position in it, was to establish Manet as the direct descendent of Delacroix.

The loss of Delacroix coincided with the advent of Manet's art before the public. On 1 March that same year (1863), Manet showed fourteen paintings at the Martinet gallery. Most of these works were painted in 1862; all shared a common characteristic: the painter's admiration for Spanish painting. Manet had yet to visit Spain; his awareness of Spanish painting was limited to the Louvre's collection and to reproductions. Nevertheless, the young Parisian painter had discovered in the work of seventeenth-century Spanish masters the colour quality he was seeking in his own painting. According to critics, even the most intimate painting exhibited at Martinet, the *Boy with a Sword* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art) painted in 1861, was an intentional evocation of Spanish *infante* portraiture. The little boy who posed for the painting in Manet's rue Guyot studio, Léon Koelle-Leenhoff, was probably the only son of Manet and his wife, the pianist Suzanne Leenhoff.

Manet's admiration for the palette of Velázquez is evident in the boy's black and white costume, his pink complexion, and the green-brown background. In *Young Woman Reclining in Spanish Costume* (New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery), a young woman lying on a sofa (probably Nadar's mistress) also wears a Spanish man's costume. Contemporaries saw the influence of Goya in the red velvet sofa and the warm highlights on white satin combined with the black bolero jacket. We know that Nadar photographed Goya's *The Clothed Maja* (*Maja Vestida*, Madrid, Museo del Prado) and that the photograph was sold in Paris. In fact, Manet wrote the following dedication on the painting's grey

Edouard Manet,
The Grand Canal, Venice, 1874.
Oil on canvas, 57 x 48 cm.
Private collection (formerly property of the Provincial Security Council, San Francisco).

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background: “To my friend Nadar, Manet.” Manet also employed a Spanish palette of silvery grey, pink, and cherry-red in *The Street Singer* (*p. 51*). The painting was based on real-life impressions of Paris: “At the entrance of rue Guyot a woman was coming out of a seedy bar, raising her dress and holding her guitar,” tells Proust. “He went right up to her and asked her to come pose for him. She smiled. ‘I’ll catch her again,’ Manet exclaimed, ‘and then if she doesn’t want to, I have Victorine.’” (A. Proust, *op. cit.*, p. 170).

Victorine Louise Meurent, Manet’s favourite model, played a special role in his painting during the 1860s. The painter met the young Russian girl with milky white skin somewhere in a Parisian crowd, perhaps in rue Maître Albert where she lived, not far from Manet’s studio. She posed for Manet on numerous occasions after *The Street Singer*, including the marvellous painting entitled, *Miss Victorine Meurent in the Costume of an Espada* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art), which Manet exhibited a little later. Manet actually retained the name of his model in the title of this highly eccentric composition. Although there was absolutely nothing Spanish about the subject, the painting had the atmosphere of Spain, which the painter had never actually seen, but was able to render through colour. “A female model posing as a toreador is ridiculous in terms of realism,” wrote one critic. (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 113). Manet was criticised for the clash between the bullfight scene in the background and the figure of Victorine; an inability to establish proportions; and even for his drawing and painting. One well-known critic, Castagnary, exclaimed with indignation: “Is this drawing? Is this painting?” (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 112). Only Emile Zola knew how to interpret the young painter: “The only thing guiding his choices when he assembles several objects or figures is the desire to create beautiful areas of colour and beautiful contrasts.” (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 113).

Edouard Manet,
Music in the Tuileries Gardens, 1862.
Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 118.1 cm.
The National Gallery, London.

Among the paintings exhibited at the Martinet gallery, *Lola de Valence* (Paris, Musée d’Orsay) was unquestionably the most Spanish. During the summer of 1862, all of Paris rushed to the Hippodrome where dancers from the royal theatre of Madrid and a troupe called La Flor de Sevilla were performing for the National Ballet of Spain. Manet persuaded several dancers to pose for him and painted in the studio of his friend Stevens, which was large enough for him to paint the canvas entitled, *The Spanish Ballet* (Washington D.C., Phillips Collection), also shown at Martinet. Within this troupe, Parisians saved their greatest admiration for Lola Melea, a dancer known by her stage name Lola de Valence. Lola posed for Manet in his studio. Once again, Manet composed an eccentric scene: Lola is depicted backstage, where an opening reveals a theatre full of restless, noisy spectators. Manet relies on colour and colour alone to create this last impression. Upon closer inspection, one realises that there are no concrete figures, only loose touches of colour. Lola stands in fourth position holding a fan, in the attitude of Goya’s famous painting, *The Duchess of Alba* (New York, Hispanic Society of America). Manet’s friend Charles Baudelaire was also taken by the dancing of Lola, in his own words, “my preferred dancer, the amusing model of my friend Manet, so

Edouard Manet,
Portrait of Irma Brunner or *Woman with a Black Hat* or *The Viennese Woman*, c. 1880.
Pastel on canvas and frame, 53.5 x 44.1 cm.
Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

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often celebrated, kissed, and caressed in Paris." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 146). Moreover, the sonnet he wrote about her was dedicated not to the actual dancer, but to the Lola of Manet's painting: "*Entre tant de beautés que partout on peut voir, / Je comprends bien, amis, que le Désir balance ; / Mais on voit scintiller en Lola de Valence / Le charme inattendu d'un bijou rose et noir*" (I understand, friends, that Desire wavers between so many beauties everywhere to be seen, but in Lola de Valence we see sparkle the unexpected charm of a pink and black jewel.) (Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Paris, 2002, p. 250). In keeping with the poet's wishes, these lines were inscribed on the painting's frame for the exhibitions of 1863 and 1867. Baudelaire was celebrating exactly what aroused the indignation of critics. Paul Mantz wrote that *Lola* and *Music in the Tuileries Gardens*, "in their hodgepodge of red, blue, yellow, and black are the caricature of colour, not colour itself." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 150). To the painter's friends and enemies alike, it was precisely his colour that was most striking, as much for its intensity as for the manner in which it had been applied, forming the painting's "careless" surface. For example, on the surface of Lola's skirt, which he painted in broad black strokes, Manet seemed to have carelessly thrown small bits of red, green, and yellow impasto. It represented an unprecedented freedom, even compared to Courbet's palette painting.

Courbet's name automatically came to mind at the Martinet exhibition. Manet was definitely walking in Courbet's footsteps with his composition entitled, *Music in the Tuileries Gardens* (London, National Gallery). Nevertheless, Manet had more spontaneity; he did not elaborate the setting, but seemed to capture a slice of life as it unfolded around him. Manet had depicted the Paris crowd during one of the concerts regularly given in the Tuileries gardens. The military orchestra that normally played there is outside of the picture frame. What the spectator sees before him is an aspect of society life in which the painter himself was a devoted participant. Here is Manet depicted in his own painting, on the left, next to his studio mate Albert de Balleroy. (Fantin-Latour also depicts them side by side two years later in his *Homage to Delacroix*). The critic Champfleury is visible between their heads and the artist's brother, Eugène Manet, is also depicted. And more of Manet's friends are recognisable dotting the audience: the painter Henri Fantin-Latour, the writers Charles Baudelaire and Zacharie Astruc, the journalist Aurélien Schol, the inspector of museums, Baron Taylor, and the composer Jacques Offenbach, who would soon become famous for his operettas *La Belle Hélène* and *La Vie Parisienne*. Women in refined fashionable outfits are making conversation: in the foreground is Madame Lejosne, wife of Comandant Lejosne, a friend of Manet's; the woman next to her with an elegant violet in her hat is probably Madame Offenbach. The painting was Manet's first attempt at depicting the mosaic of real Parisian life. No one had ever painted such a composition before. The colour of the Parisian crowd – a combination of pink, blue, golden yellow, black, and white – reflected the artist's passion for the usual Spanish masters. It was said that Manet had made plein-air watercolour studies in the Tuileries gardens, but the influence of such a process is difficult to detect in the dark foliage of Manet's trees.

Edouard Manet,

Mr and Mrs Auguste Manet, 1860.

Oil on canvas, 110 x 90 cm.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

To the future Impressionists, Manet's colour and style of painting were a revelation, even if in principle they contrasted with their own investigations. At this stage, Manet was oblivious to plein-air painting and the direct observation of colour in nature held no interest for him. The coloration of Manet's "Spanish" paintings was acquired from the museums. He had intensified his colour and made

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his brushwork more expressive than that of the old masters. Moreover, Manet had actually invented the colour that his admirers, the future impressionists, were trying to find in living nature. They were following different paths and it is not surprising that Manet did not want to exhibit with the young artists in 1874, whatever pretext he used to justify declining the invitation.

Two months after the Martinet gallery show, Paris got a new surprise. On 1 May, 1863, for the first time in the history of French art, two parallel exhibitions opened simultaneously: the traditional Salon and the Salon des Refusés. The number of complaints from rejected artists that year was especially high: out of 5,000 submitted canvases, only 2,783 had been accepted, barely over half of all works submitted. In fact, many of the paintings rejected clearly were beneath the professional level required by the jury. But there were others that the jury had deemed too daring in pictorial style.

Manet was obviously in this category. Napoleon III had come to personally tour the exhibition rooms shortly before their opening. Astonished by the jury's strictness, he ordered all the rejected paintings be exhibited. Two of Manet's Spanish paintings found their way into the Salon des Refusés: *Miss Victorine Meurent in the Costume of an Espada* and *Young Man in the Costume of a Mayo* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art), as well as a new painting, *Luncheon on the Grass* (pp. 54-55). "The two exhibits were only separated by a turnstile," one of the rejected artists remembered. "People expected a good laugh and did laugh, from the door. Manet, in the most remote room, burned a hole in the wall with his *Luncheon on the Grass*" (A. Tabarant, *Manet. Histoire catalographique*, Paris, 1931, p. 95).

Today, it is difficult to understand why this painting so shocked its contemporaries. According to the memoirs of Antonin Proust, it was conceived en plein-air in Argenteuil. Manet was lost in the contemplation of bathers coming out of the water. "It looks like I have to do a nude," he told me. "And I'm really going to give them one, a nude." After that, however, he remembered a painting, then attributed to Giorgione, called *The Pastoral Concert* that he had previously copied in the Louvre. He executed it absolutely to the letter. Instead of musicians in red velvet Renaissance costume, Manet's painting depicts his brother Eugène and his brother-in-law in the company of a nude Victorine Meurent, seated in a clearing having a picnic. Some critics found the painting indecent. "These two characters have the air of vacationing schoolboys, making an outrageous remark," wrote one of them "and I search in vain for the meaning of this rather unsuitable enigma" (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 166). Still, the discussions surrounding the painting's subject matter fail to explain its almost total rejection. Manet was also criticised for the spontaneity of his depiction of real people in the process of having a picnic: the forms of the nude model were far from the classical ideal, and the man reclining next to Victorine simply looked ugly. Even one of Baudelaire's friends, the critic Théophile Toret, questioned Manet's taste.

Edouard Manet,
Portrait of Théodore Duret, 1868.
Oil on canvas, 43 x 35 cm.
Petit Palais – Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, Paris.

Edouard Manet,
The Absinthe Drinker, c. 1859.
Oil on canvas, 181 x 106 cm.
Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

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Edouard Manet,
The Luncheon in the Studio, 1868.
Oil on canvas, 118 x 153.9 cm.
Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

Edouard Manet,
The Balcony, 1868.
Oil on canvas, 170 x 124.5 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

There was something else about this painting that was grating, although it was never expressly articulated. In his landscape, Manet had broken the tradition of following the classical rules of constructing aerial perspective. To understand the simplicity and intelligence of the academic system for rendering aerial perspective in a landscape, one only has to look at any one of Claude Lorrain's paintings. The painting's foreground was supposed to be in warm, yellow-brown tones, which became progressively cooler and generally green in the middle ground, and were shaded to merge by gradation with the distance, which was a cold, blue-green. But Manet's foreground is bright green, rather than a warm, yellow-brown; and Manet's background shines with yellow sunlight, rather than fades into blue-green. In the middle ground, a half-dressed woman splashes around in pure blue water. In the foreground, the artist paints a still life, whose bright blue shadows and yellow and cherry-red colours compete with the tonalities of the figures. Broad strokes of colour applied with apparent carelessness give the impression of a sketch made *a la prima*. In fact, Manet was still using a multi-layered pictorial technique, as he was taught by Couture, a top painting instructor. X-ray photographs of Manet's paintings show a classic under layer of lead white, upon which (once it had dried) layers of colour were superimposed. The end result was nevertheless inconsistent with traditional values; it moreover seemed impossible for such a painting to have been executed out of doors. Degas later provided these clarifications: "Manet was not thinking in terms of plein-air painting when he did *Luncheon on the Grass*. He only got that idea after seeing Monet's first paintings." (L. Halévy, *Degas parle*, Paris, 1960, p. 110-111). Nevertheless, this was the specific painting that shocked the future Impressionists and led them to work en plein-air, something Manet learned to do later, thanks to their example.

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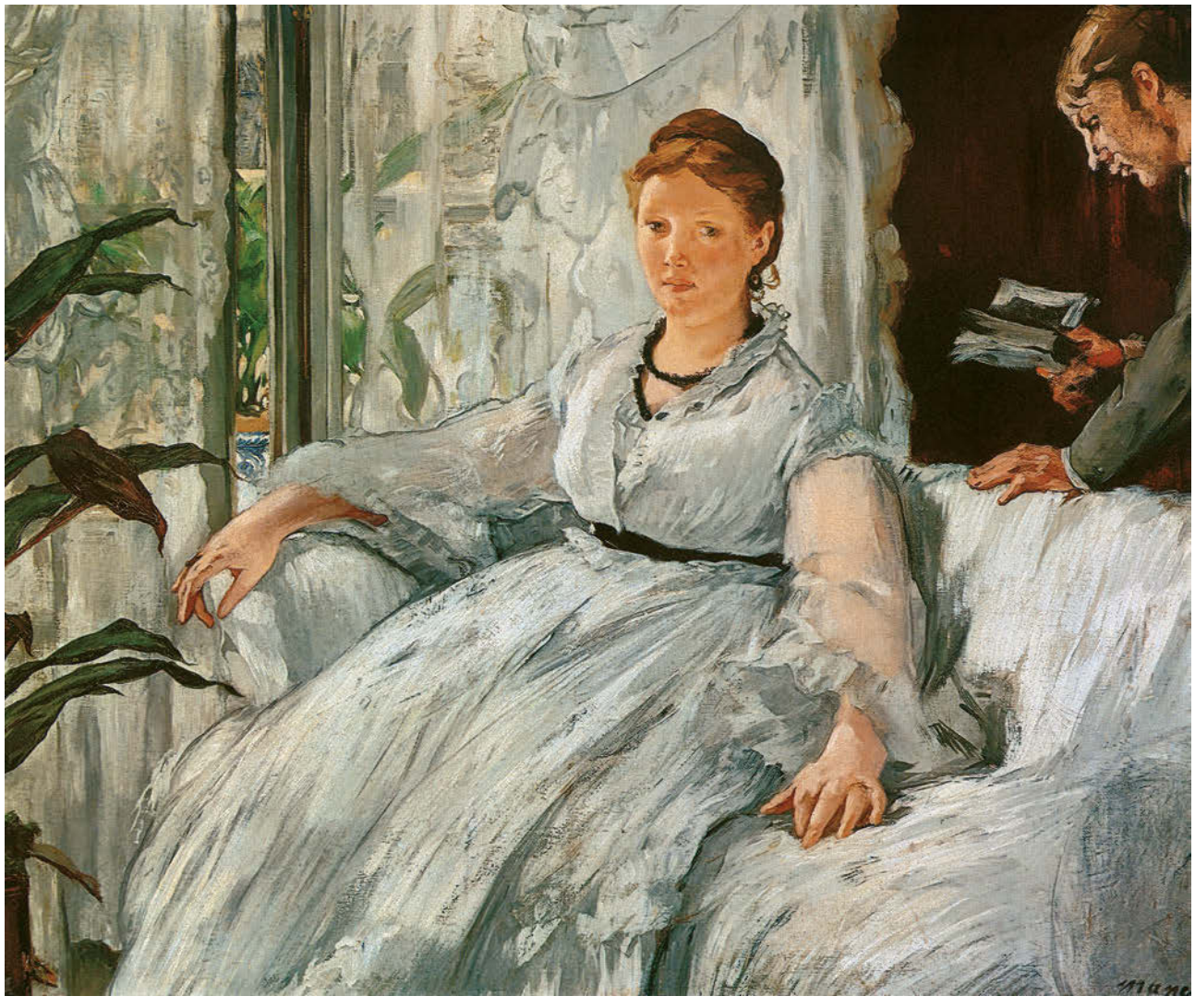

Manet was a man of the world. Emile Zola wrote that Manet, like the rest of society, dreamt of the kind of success in Paris where he would be praised by women, adulated by critics, and received in salons. According to Anontin Proust, Manet lost faith after cruel attacks from the press. After the pitiful reception of *Luncheon on the Grass*, he dared not show another painting he had finished in 1863, that in a certain sense was the summation of all his youthful work. Nevertheless, nothing could deter Manet from his chosen path in life, so in 1865 *Olympia* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) was shown to the viewing public.

And again there was shock and an incredible scandal around the painting. "Insults rain down on me like hailstones," Manet wrote to Baudelaire, "I've never had such a reception." (*Manet*, *op. cit*, p. 181). The painter was accused of every conceivable sin. At the same time, the Paris Salon was full of nude Venuses depicting the classical ideal of beauty. Baudry's *The Pearl and the Wave* and Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) had generated enthusiasm in 1863; only a few years earlier, viewers had admired the female figures in *The Romans of the Decadence* painted by Manet's master, Thomas Couture. The reappearance of Victorine Meurent, who was recognised immediately, caused great emotion. Her complete nudity was emphasised by a thin, velvet ribbon around her neck and by a bracelet. She was lying on a white sheet and a pink silk shawl. The black servant confirmed what everyone suspected, namely that this was definitely a prostitute waiting for a client who had brought her a bouquet carefully made by a florist. Unlike Titian's *Vénus d'Urbino*, which Manet greatly admired, but which only existed in the closed world of his canvas, Olympia looked out at the viewer unabashedly.

Edouard Manet,
Repose (Portrait of Berthe Morisot), 1870.
Oil on canvas, 60.5 x 73.5 cm.
Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence.

Edouard Manet,
Reading, 1869.
Oil on canvas, 61 x 74 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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Everything in this painting caused indignation, beginning with the title on the frame. Who was this Olympia? There were wide-ranging interpretations. Olympia was the name of an evil woman in the Tales of Hoffmann, which were very popular in Paris at the time. Or the name may have been suggested by an insipid poem written by Manet's friend Zacharie Astruc: "When weary of dreaming Olympia wakes up/springtime is in the arms of the gentle black messenger/it's the same slave to the lover's night/that wants to celebrate the lovely day to see/the majestic young girl in whom the flame is vigilant." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 179).

In any case, the name given to the painting defied classical tradition. As for the technique, critics had nothing positive to say about it: "The flesh tones are dirty… shadows are indicated by more or less large strips of shoe polish…An almost childlike ignorance of the most basic elements of drawing…" But the most hideous thing was the colour: "The dark red-head is incomparably ugly… White, black, red, and green make a hideous racquet on this canvas." (sic) (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 182). Even Courbet was incapable of understanding Manet's *Olympia*. "It's flat, it has no modelling," he said. "It looks like the queen of spades from a deck of cards coming out of the bath." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 182).

Manet, always ready to give back in kind, replied that he was tired of endless modelling and that Courbet's ideal form apparently was a billiard ball. In Manet's painting, the female nude definitely lacks the characteristics of a billiard ball; Manet made no use of traditional modelling, his essential method still involved the use of colour. Precise contours and delicate nuances of colour created the figure's volume and forms. And just as in *Lola*, Manet's seemingly careless impasto technique creates an impression of freshness in the flower bouquet. With the black cat arching its back at the foot of the bed, the painting was perceived by contemporaries as a means to simultaneously mock bourgeois decency, good taste, and the classical rules of art.

Another source of distress for Manet was the fact that critics were starting to confuse his name with the very similar name of another painter – Claude Monet, whom nobody knew yet. In 1865, Monet exhibited his seascapes, for which an inattentive critic complemented Edouard Manet. "Ah! My dear, it's disgusting, I am furious," Manet told a friend. "The only time I receive a complement, it's for someone else's painting. Anyone would think it's a hoax." (D. Wildenstein, *Claude Monet*, Paris, 1971, p. 17). The next year, in 1866, Monet exhibited a portrait of his wife in a green dress. An interesting text was placed under a caricature of the painting: "Monet or Manet? – Monet. But it's to Manet that we owe this Monet; Bravo, Monet! Thank you, Manet." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 509). In this way the caricaturist clearly established the correlation between the two painters. A little later, Zacharie Astruc introduced the young landscape painter Monet to his friend Manet. Monet's respect for his elder and Manet's interest in the new methods that he saw in Monet's painting meant that these two men were quickly to become friends. One by one, the painters who were later called the Impressionists gathered around Manet.

Edouard Manet,
Portrait of Victorine Meurent, c. 1862.
Oil on canvas, 42.9 x 43.8 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

The confusion between the two painters' similar names was due to the fact that both artists started to paint seascapes in the mid 1860s. Monet had grown up in Le Havre and Manet spent nearly every summer since childhood on the northern coast of France in Boulogne. Nevertheless, Manet had never painted seascapes before. In fact, the painting that he did in 1864, *The Battle of the "Kearsarge" and*

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the "*Alabama*" (p. 61), was not actually a seascape in genre. In July 1864, when Manet arrived in Boulogne, life threw him the gift of a marvellous subject: in the Channel off Cherbourg a battle was taking place between two American ships, the federal corvette called the "Kearsarge" and the Confederate ship called the "Alabama." The "Kearsarge" attacked and sank the "Alabama." Naturally, such an important event as the American Civil War being fought along the French coast impressed many people at the time. Manet was not indifferent to political life and even less to events that took place at sea: his naval past had left him with romantic memories. This painting may be considered his first historical painting. We are unaware if Manet witnessed the combat himself, but according to his own words, he painted the "Kearsarge" after nature when it was anchored at Boulogne. This painting, however, only depicts the Confederate Alabama in the process of sinking and two sailing ships, one French and one American en route to aid the survivors. Nevertheless, it was the landscape in this painting, not the dynamics of the battle, that impressed all who saw it. The sea in Manet's painting is alive. The artist seems to have viewed it from the deck of a boat, rather than from shore. Its bright green surface extends to the top of the canvas like a huge panel of fabric. It is a uniform green without

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any reflections of colour; the impression of waves is solely created by some white touches. "It's the feeling of nature and of landscape," wrote one critic, himself a native of Normandy, "very simple and powerful… Mr Manet has shifted his two vessels to the horizon. He had the good taste to diminish them through the distance, but the sea that he causes to swell all over, the sea that he extends and leads up to the frame of his painting… is more terrible than the combat…" (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 219).

Edouard Manet,
Lola de Valence, 1862.
Oil on canvas, 123 x 92 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

In other seascapes as well, Manet painted the sea in the flat tone of a uniform colour, on the surface of which he drew the backlit, black silhouettes of sailing ships in the form of commas. Monet was undoubtedly impressed by these seascapes as a French Norman. Nevertheless, the young Monet was such a powerful individual that it was his own painting that much later influenced Manet. When Manet painted *Rochefort's Escape* (Zurich, Kunsthaus) in 1881, the green surface of the sea vibrated with nervous touches of lead white nonchalantly placed, with various references, as in the painting of Monet.

Each painting by Manet was a new surprise, due to his unexpected pictorial approach. In 1866 he painted *The Fifer* (p. 68). Some critics saw a resemblance to Victorine Meurent in the fresh adolescent face, but more than likely the painting depicts a little musician who actually posed for the painting: there were musicians' quarters next to Manet's studio. The figure of the fifer, outlined in black, appears to be cut out from the shimmering grey-green background, which represents nothing more than the air. Manet was the first painter to use colour to render surrounding air. The painting has no concrete decoration, landscape, or interior. Only a small strip of shadow extends from the fifer's feet to show he stands firmly on solid ground. Three flat patches of colour – deep red, black, and white – form the painting's palette with extreme concision. Only the little boy's face is handled with delicate pink shades.

The concision of Manet's painting lost none of its meaning for succeeding generations of painters. Matisse wrote: "He was the first one to act instinctively and thereby simplify the art of painting…A great painter is one who discovers viable individual gestures to express the subject of his vision in formal terms. Manet found his." (R. Cogniat et M. Hoog, *Manet*, Paris, 1982, p. 35-36).

The year 1867 was full of significant events in Manet's life. It was the year of the new Universal Exposition. Courbet opened his own independent pavilion as before. Manet, too, decided to do

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something rash: with his own means, he built a temporary shelter next to Courbet's exhibition at the corner of avenues Montaigne and Alma, not far from the Universal Exposition. "I decided to have my own exhibition," he wrote to Emile Zola. "I have at least forty paintings to show. I've already been offered some very good locations near the Champ-de-Mars." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 520). Manet assembled fifty canvases there, including all those that had previously provoked scandal: *The Street Singer*, *Miss Victorine Meurent in the Costume of an Espada*, *Lola*, *Luncheon on the Grass*, *Olympia*, and *Music in the Tuileries Gardens*. He knew that the public might have another violent reaction against his painting and he anticipated a new wave of malicious criticism, perhaps even mockery. According to his own words, he wanted to make peace with the segment of the public that opposed him. He wrote the preface to his own catalogue, talking about himself in the third person, mentioning the many times his paintings had suffered rejection by the Salon jury and said that in the public's eyes, an award from the Salon was a guarantee of talent. Thus the artist found himself trapped in a narrow circle he could not escape. Manet continued on, saying that if creativity was becoming a battle, it should be fought with equal weapons, meaning painters must have the chance to show their work. He explained the reasons why he organised an independent exhibition and called on visitors not to admire his paintings, but to understand that all his work was honest and truthful. He added that he had never suggested abolishing old painting or establishing a new painting. He only wanted to be himself and not someone else. It was precisely this honesty that gave his work its character of protest, but as a painter he had never wanted to protest. It was the viewers who had protested against his painting because it did not employ the traditional forms and techniques they were accustomed to. One can only get used to initially troublesome and offensive painting by carefully viewing it many times over, only then is one able to understand and also eventually subscribe to an artist's work. Manet declared that exhibiting was a matter of life or death for an artist; it meant finding friends and allies in the battle.

Edouard Manet,
The Street Singer, 1862.
Oil on canvas, 175 x 109 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

And Manet truly threw himself into battle. In addition to the fashionable critics who were already having fun at the painter's expense and were openly mocking his paintings, Manet received a new insult from the great Courbet. Passing by his neighbour's exhibition, Courbet burst out with resounding laughter: "What Spaniards!" he said and left. Nevertheless, as Manet expected, such an exhibition also helped him find true friends. Beginning in 1866, when the Salon jury rejected *The Fifer*, Emile Zola took up Manet's defence in his review of the Salon. Zola was the first to openly declare his admiration of Manet's talent, honesty, and desire to create by listening to his own heart. Zola said that it was popular to take sides in France and to roast someone. The public saw Manet as an adolescent,

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a semi-novice who gathered the drunkards of his genre around him. This slacker specialised in painting caricatures to amuse the public and in this way attract attention to himself. Zola spoke of Manet as a painter who stayed close to nature, placing his confidence solely in the observation of nature, rather than science or experience. He wrote that *Luncheon on the Grass* and *Olympia* were masterpieces and that Manet's paintings belonged in the Louvre. "Since nobody says it, I will say it myself," he wrote. "I will shout it out. I am so confident that the future will consider Mr Manet master that I would consider it a great opportunity to buy all of his paintings now, if I had the fortune." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 280). Manet was deeply touched and wrote to the critic afterwards: "Dear Mr Zola, I don't know where to find you to take your hand and tell you how pleased and proud I am to be defended by a man of your talent. What a beautiful article! Very many thanks." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 520). In 1867, Zola wrote a study on Manet for the *La Revue du XIX^e^ siècle*, and then published a brochure containing this study, a portrait of Manet engraved by Braquemont, and an etching with Manet's *Olympia*. At this time Manet was already writing to him like a close friend: "My dear Zola, I must confess to you that it would only give me pleasure to see your brochure on me sold at my exhibition." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 520). Zola considered Manet's individual exhibition a significant cultural event on par with the exhibition of Courbet, whose genius had already been acknowledged in his lifetime. In an assessment of their work contained in an article he wrote in 1868 for *L'Evénement illustré*, he wrote that being free of Greeks, Romans, and medieval subjects (in other words, all the necessary components of neo-classical and romantic art), painting found itself face to face with real life. And it is this reality that compelled both Courbet and Manet to depict their contemporaries in their canvases as they really were, in their own clothes, and with their own moral values.

In 1868, Manet painted the *Portrait of Emile Zola* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), expressing in his own way his gratitude for Zola's support. The cover of Zola's brochure on Manet is clearly visible amongst papers scattered over a desk and the writer holds an open book in his hands – *The History of Painters* by Charles Blanc – that could always be found in Manet's studio. In the reproduction or print of Manet's *Olympia*, the model appears to have turned her eyes towards the painter, whereas in the painting she looks straight ahead: yet another expression of the gratitude the painter felt towards the writer. According to contemporaries, the Japanese engraving and the Japanese screen were part of Manet's studio décor; it was precisely the mid 1860s when a fashion for all things Japanese spread throughout Paris and a boutique opened where Japanese prints were sold. Contemporary critics noted a certain coldness in this image of Zola, a lack of intimacy in the portraiture. This may be due to the fact that the painting was intended for the Salon and therefore required an official character and a traditional composition. Or perhaps Manet and Zola had yet to become the close friends they eventually became.

In June of the same year (1867), Manet finished his history painting entitled, *The Execution of Maximilian* (p. 62). The painting reflects his active interest in the life of his times. In 1867 Mexican insurgents executed the archduke Maximilian appointed emperor of Mexico by Napoleon III, along with the generals who remained faithful to him. Many people in France blamed Napoleon for evacuating his troops from Mexico at the very moment the young emperor needed their aid. Manet was deeply moved by the tragedy and for months worked on variations of this painting, which gave new meaning to the

Edouard Manet,
The Blonde with Bare Breasts, 1873.
Oil on canvas, 62.5 x 51 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Edouard Manet,
Luncheon on the Grass, 1863.
Oil on canvas, 208 x 264.5 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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term history painting. Manet was interested in the history of his own era, rather than subjects from antique mythology and the Bible, as was the practice at the Ecole des beaux-arts and the Salon. The romantics Jéricho and Delacroix (and before them Gros, who immortalised the campaigns of Napoléon Bonaparte) had begun to make paintings in this genre. But here again Manet did everything his own way. It was no coincidence that his contemporaries were reminded of the Spanish masters when viewing Manet's *Emperor Maximilien*, specifically, Goya's *The Execution of 3 May 1808* (Madrid, Museo del Prado). In addition to learning colour from the Spanish painters, Manet also learned how to achieve the emotional tension of Goya's work. Painting themes was foreign to the future Impressionists, but that did not prevent them from once again admiring their elder, who brilliantly showed them how to follow the lessons of the old masters: "It's a Goya, and yet Manet has never been more himself!" exclaimed Renoir before this painting. (Ambroise Vollard, *Souvenirs d'un marchand de tableaux*, Paris, 1936, p. 72).

Edouard Manet,
Georges Clemenceau (Portrait of Georges Clemenceau at the Tribune), 1879-1880.
Oil on canvas, 115.9 x 88.2 cm.
Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth.

1867 was also marked by another event that deeply moved Manet: the death of Baudelaire, the great poet and friend who had supported Manet so much early in his painting career. Few friends came to accompany the poet to his final resting place when the burial took place on 2 September. It was the end of a very hot summer. There was no mail on Sunday and many people received the funeral notice too late to attend. Additionally, a big storm erupted at the moment of interment and thunder chased away many of those who had come. Manet was among eleven people who followed the funeral procession to the Montparnasse cemetery. It is quite likely that Manet's painting known as *The Funeral* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art) depicts this event. On the horizon, one can make out the silhouettes of the five recognisable monuments of Paris: the Observatoire, Val-de-Grâce, Pantheon, Saint-Etienne-du-Mont, and the tower of Clovis. The sketchy stormy sky and the upper section of the painting lit by a warm golden light contrasts with the lower section where the funeral procession is depicted in black strokes over a dark green background. The colour and contrasting light establish an emotional tension that betrays the painter's feelings. The unfinished aspect of the painting and the free application of colour through large brushwork make it even more expressive.

Another canvas painted the same year also gives the impression of being unfinished: *Races at Longchamp* (Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago). One critic even described it as a sketch. Manet was the first to depict the racetrack in painting; the subject was later taken up by Impressionist Edgar Degas. This painting shows the final moment of the races in the Bois de Boulogne. The location is rendered with great detail, with the hills of Saint-Cloud recognisable in the background. Careful observation of nature is evident in the clouds, painted with lightness and liveliness, and the veil of

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mist rendered by the painting's somewhat blurred contours. It is the only way to draw horses with such concision, as they hasten in a spirited gallop right in front of the viewer. For the first time in the visual arts, a painting calls for comparison with instantaneous photography. And here again, Manet took the first step, ahead of Impressionist Degas who had started to photograph. Nevertheless, it was not yet an issue for Manet to work en plein-air. Five years later, in 1872, he returned to the theme of the races in a new painting, *Racecourse in the Bois de Boulogne*, (p. 65) that had been commissioned by a certain Barret. It is quite likely that Manet worked en plein-air for at least part of it, but many things had changed around 1872. At that time, Manet was connected with Degas and they sometimes went to the races at Longchamp together. The possibility that future Impressionist Degas was now influencing the composition of Manet's paintings cannot be ruled out.

Manet never stopped learning, trying out new methods and techniques: it was his professional arsenal. "In this dog's life of ours, our constant battle, we can't have too many weapons," he told Degas. (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 17). One would think the public would have already become accustomed to Manet's strange style of painting, which was far from normal. But each new work he produced surprised his contemporaries, at best arousing controversy, at worst mockery and insults addressed to the artist. And although he acknowledged the existence of a fight, he was not looking to take any part in it himself. There were times when he wanted to give up and just make paintings for the market. In a letter to Fantin-Latour dated 1868 he wrote that even his friends were giving up hope of ever seeing him succeed. He said that he had been given a good lesson, that he had been kicked around enough, and that now he wanted to make money. Nevertheless, in 1868, one year after the Universal Exposition, once again he took the art of painting a step further in a new direction with new paintings. Two were in the Salon of 1869: *The Balcony* (p. 45) and *The Luncheon* or *Luncheon in the Studio* (p. 44).

Edouard Manet,
Portrait of Henri Rochefort, 1881.
Oil on canvas, 81.5 x 66.5 cm.
Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

At first glance, there is an obvious connection between *The Balcony* and Goya's *Majas on the Balcony*. Manet had produced something his viewers were accustomed to by taking his inspiration from Spanish painting once again. According to his contemporaries, Manet got the idea for this composition in 1865, after his first trip to Spain. He was reminded of it during the summer of 1868 while observing vacationers on their balcony in Boulogne-sur-Mer. Upon his return to Paris, Manet asked his friends to pose for him on the balcony of his rue Gyot studio. Manet set out once more to realise what he was talking about when he was conceiving *Luncheon on the Grass*: "I want to redo that and do it in the open air with figures such as those that you see below." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 166). He transplanted Goya's motif to the mid-nineteenth-century Paris. Manet's elegant figures have lost their romantic appearance and

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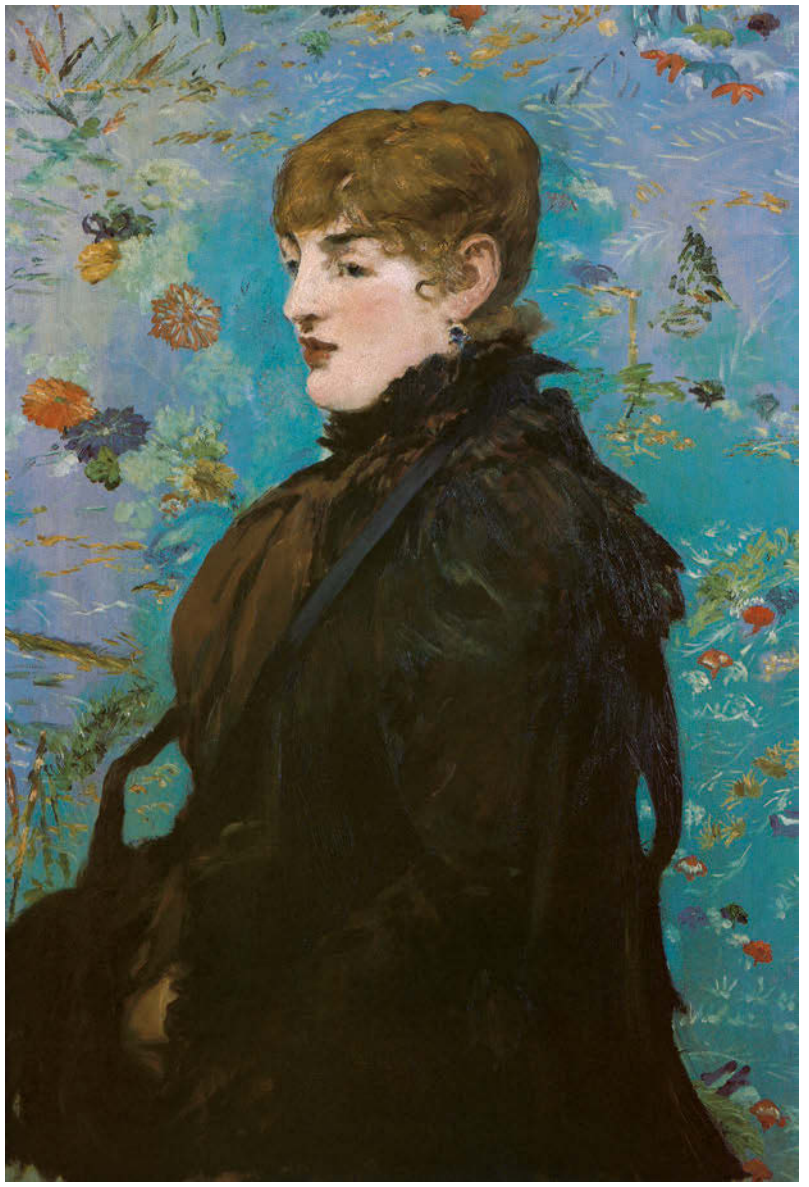
bring the atmosphere of everyday life into the picture – albeit the life of fashionable Paris. At that time, Monet was not painting en plein-air the same way he did in *Luncheon on the Grass*. He had placed his figures in a contemporary Parisian context. And once again, as in *Music in the Tuileries Gardens*, the painting has no subject and tells no story. Viewers accustomed to paintings having a literary aspect felt compelled to ask questions about Manet's subject: had these Parisians come out onto the balcony to watch the carnival proceed along the boulevard? Even a critic such as Castagnary, accustomed to Courbet's realism, formulated his own propositions: "I see two women on this balcony, one of which is much younger. Are they two sisters? Is it a mother and daughter? I don't know. And then one is seated and seems to be positioned purely to enjoy the street scene; the other one is putting her gloves on as if she were going out. This contradictory pose puzzles me." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 307). As paradoxical as it may seem, in the eyes of Manet's contemporaries, the lack of literary content made his work enigmatic. The idea that one could create a painting solely for pictorial reasons (as Manet had done with the *Fifer)* was foreign to people living in the nineteenth century. Manet may have been the first person to plant this idea into the minds of his contemporaries. Even a century later, specialists continued to look for hidden meaning in *The Balcony*. One researcher put forth the hypothesis that each figure symbolised a country whose painting had inspired Manet: the seated woman in a white dress holding a fan symbolised Spain; the second woman wearing a small, eccentric hat symbolised Japan; and the robust male figure standing in the back symbolised Holland, a country Manet liked to visit and in whose old masters he found much to imitate, and which was also the native country of his wife, Suzanne. In reality, Manet was the first nineteenth-century painter to let himself be guided primarily by colour and light when composing his works, which is why he became a model and a master for the future Impressionists.



Edouard Manet,
Portrait of Emile Zola, 1868.
Oil on canvas, 146.5 x 114 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Edouard Manet,
Autumn (Méry Laurent), 1881.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 51 cm.
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nancy.

A preliminary pencil sketch by Manet shows that in a first version, the closed shutters served as a background for the figures on the balcony. In the painting, the shutters are nothing more than a frame for the central part of the composition, accentuating the contrast between light and dark and softening the gradations of colour. The foreground is lightened by the women's white dresses. Then the eye plunges into deep shadow from which a first male figure emerges, almost completely concealing the second figure of a servant carrying a platter.

As for the colour, it is much more complex than it appears at first glance. The green of the shutters and the balustrade is the most boldly emphasised colour. The white fabric is painted with more subtle gradations, from its bluish shadows to the pink and gold effects of sunlight. This is the type of painting that could inspire the quivering, vibrating colour of Renoir's white Parisian dresses. In Manet's painting, insignificant details like a closed fan or umbrella play an enormous role. In fact,

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that is where colour effects really emphasise the painting's pictorial range. The thin brown line of the fan, the medallion with gold highlights, the green patch of the umbrella, and the green velvet ribbon around the woman's neck – all serve to balance the painting's warm and cold tones. The blue patch of hydrangea is skilfully blended into the overall rhythm, playing down the intensity of the green balustrade. The manner in which Manet handles the earthenware vase demonstrates his respect for older painting traditions.

Finally, let's take a look at the figures in the painting. All were close friends of Manet and under age thirty at the time. They did not yet believe Manet would become a famous painter; they were not the least bit flattered to be painted by him and even complained that it was tiring to pose standing. The young seated woman with the huge dark eyes is the painter Berthe Morisot. Her destiny, her relationship with Manet, and his portraits of her merit special attention (cf. the chapter on Berthe Morisot). To the right stands the violinist Fanny Claus, who often played with Manet's wife Suzanne. Claus married Manet's friend, the painter Pierre Prins and always remained a friend of the family. The young man standing was also a painter: the landscape painter Antoine Guillement who was a friend of the Impressionists. And posing as the servant, almost concealed by shadow, was the same Léon Leenhoff Manet had painted as a young boy in the Spanish infante costume. In fact, Manet had created a new genre of painting for his day. It was neither a classical painting of traditional moral values, nor a portrait of a fashionable salon, nor a group portrait of friends. *Music in the Tuileries Gardens, The Balcony,* and perhaps even *Luncheon on the Grass* had already paved the way for these spontaneous scenes of contemporary life that the artist was familiar with and in which he and his friends all participated. Pierre Auguste Renoir would continue the genre. Indeed, both Manet and Renoir would leave behind a living image of Parisian life in the nineteenth century.

The Luncheon is in the same vein. It was composed during the summer of 1868 in Boulogne-sur-Mer where Manet was staying with his family. X-ray photography reveals the background initially depicted large studio windows overlooking the sea. Manet eliminated them in the final version, in which the room instead takes on the appearance of a dining room. The background has become darker; now it is the faces and interior details that are becoming exceptionally expressive, thanks to the lighting. A pensive young man leans against a table, his figure cut-off at the knees, giving the viewer the impression that at any moment he might step forward to leave the room and at the same time walk out of the painting. This is the first time Manet directly combines reality with the world in the painting to bring the viewer into the composition he created. The painting's main character is still the same Léon Leenhoff we watch grow into adulthood in Manet's paintings. In 1868 he had already started working in a bank owned by the father of Edgar Degas. He always called Manet and his wife Suzanne "godfather" and "godmother," but as he himself acknowledged, until the end of his life he never knew if he was Manet's actual son, adopted son, or Suzanne's little brother. In this painting, the presence of Manet's ward created a warm and intimate atmosphere that later became characteristic of the Impressionists. However, in Manet's work one never finds the impression of a fleeting moment seized from life that Renoir knew how to render with such grace and spontaneity. As later will the Impressionists, in this painting Manet again uses those closest to him as models. Claude Monet was the figure of the smoker during the first sessions; Manet's neighbour in Boulogne, the painter Auguste Rousselin who apprenticed with Manet in Couture's studio, later replaced

Edouard Manet,
The Battle of the "Kearsarge" and the "Alabama", 1864.
Oil on canvas, 134 x 127 cm.
The John G. Johnson Collection,
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

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him. It is sometimes assumed that the woman in the background with the coffee pot was Manet's wife, but most likely it is a servant. Her beautiful grey dress, combined with the silver colour of the coffee pot form the basis of an elegant palette once again reminiscent of the Spanish masters. A knight's armour draped over a chair shines with a dark silver lustre, and a well-ironed silk tablecloth absolutely shimmers with pearly moiré. A plant in an earthenware pot makes another appearance, in this instance constituting one of Manet's best still lifes.

The beauty of this still life was the only aspect of the painting praised by critics of the 1869 Salon. Castagnary focused his attention on it and he was enthusiastic about its naturalism: "Looking at *The Luncheon* for example, I see a half-peeled lemon and fresh oysters on the table where coffee is served." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 294). This still life actually has many noteworthy aspects. The drawing on the earthenware pot reflects Parisian *japonism*. The lemon, earthenware, tablecloth, fruit knife, and glass of wine – all are painted with such precision in handling and arranged in so harmonious a fashion that Manet may in truth rival the seventeenth-century Dutch masters or Chardin. The still life had already become an independent genre in Manet's work much earlier. He painted stems of peonies tossed on a table and flowers in a porcelain vase. In Boulogne-sur-Mer, his imagination was struck by the freshness of the colour of just-caught fish. In *Still Life with Fish* (Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago), in spite of all Manet's respect for the old masters, colour is spread freely over the canvas in large patches, giving the painting an unfinished look or even the look of a sketch. In *Fruit on a Table* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) and *Still Life with Melon and Peaches* (Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art), the silk tablecloth, glass, metal knife, and the dull skin of the peaches are executed with the meticulousness of the "minor" Dutch masters. Painted in 1864-1866, these canvases were a test of maturity for a classical master who, after perfectly assimilating the various techniques of his teachers, finds himself on an independent path.

One not immediately obvious detail completes the impression of warm intimacy: the black cat at the servant's feet, against the background of her grey dress. Manet had painted animals before, for example, the little dog playing with a ball at Berthe Morisot's feet in *The Balcony*, which was reminiscent of the small dogs in Goya's portraits. But the black cat was to become Manet's trademark, appearing for the first time in *Olympia,* where its well-observed attitude was already attracting attention. Among the many cats Manet drew in India ink on the pages of his notebook, is the same cat that is taking a bath in *The Luncheon*. On October 17, 1868 a poster designed by Manet was discovered on the walls of Paris, causing an immediate sensation. It served as an announcement for a little book by Manet's friend Champfleury that had just come out called, *Les Chats : histoire, mœurs, observations, anecdotes (Cats: history, habits, observations, and anecdotes)*, with illustrations by several artists, including Delacroix and Manet. Manet had drawn the same "rendez-vous of cats" for this book: two cats, one black and one white, arching their backs on a rooftop, which all Paris recognised from the poster. Manet executed a second noteworthy graphic work much later in 1875 when he did the illustrations to Edgar Allen Poe's poem, *The Raven*, translated into French by Stéphane Mallarmé, another of Manet's friends. This project was not destined for success during Manet's lifetime. In the words of Manet's biographers: "The voluminous proportions of the work, the illustrations by Edouard Manet, still much discussed in 1875, the peculiarity, for most readers, of Edgar Allen Poe's poem, the

Edouard Manet,
The Execution of Maximilian, 1867.
Oil on canvas, four fragments,
193 x 284 cm.
The National Gallery, London.

Edouard Manet,
The Execution of Maximilian, 1868.
Oil on canvas, 252 x 305 cm.
Städtische Kunsthalle, Mannheim.

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Edouard Manet,
Bullfight, 1865.
Oil on canvas, 90 x 110 cm.
Private collection.

still somewhat unknown name of Mallarmé, all these things combined to put off potential buyers." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 383). Mallarmé's poem, *The Afternoon of the Faun*, was published in 1876 with illustrations by Manet. That same year Manet completed his striking *Portrait of Mallarmé* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay).

Mallarmé and Manet had met several years earlier, probably as early as 1873, when Mallarmé arrived in Paris, and they quickly became friends. Returning home from the Condorcet school where he taught English, Mallarmé often passed by Manet's studio where he met Degas, Renoir, Monet, Emile Zola and Berthe Morisot, who also became his loyal friend. It was also in this studio that Mallarmé posed for Manet. In Manet's portrait, Mallarmé seems older than he actually was at the time (thirty-four). Lying on a sofa, his ever-present cigar in hand, the poet is profoundly pensive. His casual attitude gives the portrait a special intimacy. Manet discovered an admirable colour harmony, a balance between the warm, golden tone of the Japanese fabric in the background and Mallarmé's marine blue outfit. With his free and loose paint handling Manet gives the final touch to the creation of Mallarmé's image, an image of a friend and a great poet. The painting is one of Manet's best portraits.

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Manet produced a large number of portraits in his lifetime, but he never did commissioned portraits. Starting off in the genre with a portrait of his parents, Manet proceeded to pay tribute to his best friends. In 1866, he did a portrait of Zacharie Astruc, a writer, critic, painter, and sculptor who was one of his closest friends. Just as in the portrait of Zola, Manet added a still life that, from that moment on, became an almost obligatory element in his portraits. The portrait of another friend, Théodore Duret (Paris, Petit Palais – Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris), has a more official look. Duret, whom Manet called "the last dandy," is depicted standing in an elegant outfit, cane in hand. In the painting's grey-brown colours, contemporaries saw the customary influence of Spanish painting. It may have been intentional: the two men had met during Manet's trip to Spain in 1865. Manet, still sensitive about the mocking reception of his *Olympia* in Paris, initially thought Duret was making fun of him too, but it did not take long to clear up the misunderstanding. The pair visited Madrid together and were soon closest friends.

After a foray into the cognac business, Duret became interested in painting and beginning in 1867 appeared in the press as an art critic. At first he was rather critical of Manet, disconcerted by the artist's sketch-like pictorial style. "Manet will never reach his potential by painting in a rapid, hurried style,"

Edouard Manet,
Racecourse in the Bois de Boulogne, 1872.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm.
Private collection.

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Edouard Manet,
The Plum Brandy, c. 1877.
Oil on canvas, 73.6 x 50.2 cm.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Edouard Manet,
The Spanish Singer, 1860.
Oil on canvas, 147 x 114 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

he wrote. (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 288). Nevertheless, he soon became an ardent admirer, not only of Manet, but of his Impressionist friends, as well. In 1878 he published his first serious work: *History of the Impressionist Painters*. It was Duret who described Manet's working method, which he had witnessed in Manet's studio. When Duret thought that the portrait was finished, the author was unsatisfied. Next to the model he placed a stool covered in deep red fabric and quickly set a bright green book next to it. But that was not enough. On the stool he placed a lacquer platter with a carafe, a glass, and a knife on top, then added a lemon to the glass. "Obviously he was unsatisfied with the completely grey monochrome painting," Duret commented. "It didn't have any colour to please his eye and since he didn't put them in at first, he added them later in the form of a still life." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 288). Duret had grasped the essential thing about his friend's work: Manet was born a painter the way one is born with perfect pitch. He saw his future painting in colours the same way Michelangelo felt his yet unformed sculpture in a block of stone. And whatever Manet painted, colour alone was both an end and a means.

In Manet's work it is sometimes difficult to distinguish a portrait from a scene of everyday life, even if one eliminates the instances where Manet asked his friends to pose for paintings, such as *Luncheon on the Grass* and *The Balcony*. Manet's wife, Suzanne Leenhoff, appears in his canvases seated at the piano. Manet had learned to be aware of those times she gave music lessons to him and his brothers. Suzanne posed, alone or with Léon, in the setting of their apartment or on the beaches of northern France. Manet's portraits of her, sometimes painted in light colours with pink and blue reflections, sometimes in an elegant black palette heightened with gold, give an impression of loving tranquillity.

In his later years, shortly before his death, Manet painted an entire series of portraits of beautiful Parisian women. Among them was the daughter of a Parisian jeweller named Isabelle Lemonnier with whom Manet was particularly taken. Already seriously ill, Manet sent Isabelle touching notes. In one of them, he drew a prune and wrote "*A Isabelle / cette mirabelle / et la plus belle / c'est Isabelle* " (*To Isabelle / this prune / and the most beautiful / is Isabelle*)" (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 456). Manet was never indifferent to feminine charm. In the early 1880s he was commissioned by his friend Antonin Proust to paint portrait-panels symbolising the four seasons. For *Spring* (location unknown), he chose the beautiful actress Jeanne Demarsi; for *Autumn* (p. 59), he chose Méry Laurent. An especially warm friendship developed between the painter and this model. Méry Laurent was a Parisian demimondaine. The first time she visited Manet's studio was in 1876. The painter had been seduced by her elegance and smile, and especially by her pink complexion combined with her dark blonde hair. Mallarmé was in love with Méry Laurent and composed a quatrain about her that she had engraved above the door of her Paris townhouse: "*Ouverte au rire qui l'arrose / Telle sans que rien d'amer y / Séjourne, une embaumante rose / Du jardin royal est Méry*" (Like a rose picked from the royal garden, Méry opens to the smile that waters her, harboring no bitterness) (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 489). Méry brought an elegant Viennese woman named Irma Brunner to Manet's studio. Manet painted her with various shades of pink, shaded by the black edges of her hat. Manet's artistic tastes did not allow him to become a fashionable portraitist for ladies, although he was always flattered by the admiration of his models for his portraits.

At the same time, he worked on portraits of men, among them the *Portrait of Georges Clemenceau at the Tribune* (p. 56) painted in 1880. The painter and his model were connected through the many

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friends they shared. Clemenceau had little time to sit; according to his own words, what he liked about his visits to the studio was the opportunity to talk with Manet. "I had such pleasure talking with Manet!" he remembers. "He was so witty!" (*Manet*, *op. cit.* p. 443). Manet did more than one portrait of his friend from childhood and youth, Antonin Proust, who had given him wonderful memories. The portrait of legendary journalist Henri Rochefort (Hamburg, Kunsthalle) was notable for its unusual emotional resonance. Rochefort had a romantic aura: sent to a penal colony for his participation in events under the Commune, he escaped to New Caledonia and returned to France after the amnesty. He was not a friend of Manet's and only with difficulty agreed to sit for him, refusing the portrait when it was finished because he was dissatisfied with it. His artistic tastes were too traditional to appreciate Manet's free and loose style of painting. Alphonse Daudet, who knew Rochefort since childhood, compared him to Don Quixote and Mephistopheles. Manet succeeded in rendering the journalist's strong personality. This was the essential thing to Manet, and the model's dissatisfaction never had the slightest effect on him. When the Irish writer George Moore started asking Manet to alter the pastel portrait he had painted of him (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art), Manet declared: "I will not change a thing in his portrait. Is it my fault that Moore has the air of a rotten egg and if his face lacks cohesion?… There is no symmetry in nature. One eye is never like the other; it's different. No one has a perfect nose, the mouth is always irregular." (*Manet*, *op. cit.* p. 427).

Manet revealed himself to be no less demanding when it was a matter of his own appearance. He started painting self-portraits late, in the 1870s, "at the very moment when he was at the peak of his career," wrote Théodore Duret. "He had achieved the type of fame he was entitled from his life. He was one of the most visible men in Paris." (*Manet*, *op. cit.* p. 405). In his best *Self-Portrait with a Palette* (New York, private collection), he depicts himself, as did Velázquez and Rembrandt, examining the expression of his own face. But this was very late in his career, only a few years before his death, after Manet had endured the difficult experience of the war and the Commune.

1870 was a painful year for France. Napoléon III declared war against Prussia. On 1 September, the French army, led by its emperor, surrendered in Sedan. A republic was declared in France. The Prussians were marching on Paris. Manet sent his mother, his wife, and Léon to Oloron-Sainte-Marie in the Pyrenees while he stayed behind to defend the Republic. Many artists felt distraught and decided that exile was the only way to avoid war. For Manet, it was completely natural to join the national guard as an artilleryman. On 19 September, the siege of Paris began. Manet closed his studio and stored his paintings in a secure location at Duret's. *Luncheon on the Grass*, *Olympia*, *Lola*, *The Balcony* and many others could be found there. In a postscript to a letter send to Duret, Manet wrote:

"In the event that I am killed, I give you your choice of *Moonlight over the Port of Boulogne* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) or *Woman Reading* (p. 47). If you prefer, you may ask for *Soap Bubbles*." (Museum Calouste Gulbenkian)." (A. Tabarant, *Manet et ses œuvres*, Paris, 1947, p. 182-183). While Paris was under siege, Manet experienced bombings, hunger, and cold. Mail was dispatched from the capital by balloon. In his letters, Manet told Suzanne how sad the empty house felt, and spoke about the fighting around the city, the rounds of artillery and fires, the smallpox epidemic, the violence in front of food stores, and the people who were dying of hunger. Manet told how he got himself

Edouard Manet,
The Fifer, 1866.
Oil on canvas, 161 x 97 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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Edouard Manet,

Portrait of Berthe Morisot Resting, 1873.

Oil on canvas, 26 x 34 cm.

Musée Marmottan, Paris.

transferred to headquarters, because serving in the artillery was too much for him. Painting under these conditions was impossible. There is one drawing by Manet that depicts a line outside a food store and a few sketches of street scenes. In late January, Paris surrendered. On 12 February, Manet left to join his family in the south of France and he did not learn that the revolution had broken out in Paris and that the Commune had been declared until he got to Arcachon. In April, a manifesto announcing the creation of a federation of artists to which he had been elected during his absence, along with twenty-five other painters and ten sculptors, appeared in the Commune's official publication, *Le Journal Officiel de la Commune*. Manet only returned to Paris around the end of June, 1871, after the *semaine sanglante*, or "bloody week" was over. His return to work after such a long interruption was difficult. His material situation no longer existed. Fortunately, the art dealer Durand-Ruel purchased twenty-four paintings from him that he proceeded to show in various exhibitions.

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Before the war, in May of 1870, Manet's friend Henri Fantin-Latour had shown a large group portrait called *A Studio in the Batignolles,* or *Homage to Manet* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay). Manet is depicted seated at his easel, surrounded by his young friends. Behind him, against the background of an empty frame is the profile of Renoir. Next to Renoir, seated behind Astruc, stood Emile Zola, Manet's main defender. Near the musician Edmond Maître, somewhat in shadow, the statuesque Frédéric Bazille stood in the foreground; Fantin-Latour has emphasised him as an obvious talent. And lastly, Claude Monet appears behind Bazille's back. The future Impressionists were grouped around Manet, although they had yet to become known as a group before the first Impressionist exhibit. At that time people were calling them "Manet's bunch." And although Manet refused to exhibit with them, contemporaries associated his name with Impressionism.

Castagnary spoke of Manet's influence on the Impressionists, Mallarmé considered Manet a key figure in their artistic movement, and Silvestre mentioned "the little school of the intransigents, of

Edouard Manet,

Portrait of Stéphane Mallarmé, 1876.

Oil on canvas, 27.5 x 36 cm.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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which he [Manet] is considered the leader." (A. Tabarant, *op. cit.*, p. 285). In reality, Manet did not have the same artistic goals as the Impressionists, and there was no Manet school. As Silvestre himself affirms, Manet was incapable of such an involvement: "No one was less temperamentally inclined; I have never seen a nature so immune to pomposity," wrote the critic. (A. Silvestre, *Au pays des souvenirs*, Paris 1887, p. 160). Yet Manet played a significant role in the birth of Impressionism and his contemporaries understood it. Duranty said it best when he said that Manet "withstood the fiercest battle and didn't just crack an opening, but threw open the biggest windows and threw down walls to the open air and real sunlight, was at the head of the movement and with candour and courage provided the public with the newest works, the most marred by faults, the most surrounded with qualities." (E. Duranty, *La Nouvelle Peinture : à propos du groupe d'artistes qui expose dans les galeries Durand-Ruel* [1876], Paris, 1946, p. 17). The Impressionist label was not applied to Manet personally, but an artist as daring as he would certainly have kept an eye on the young painters. As it happened, their art could also offer something to the more experienced master, and if the characteristic traits of Impressionism appeared in the work of Manet, it was specifically during a brief period after the war, the year of the first Impressionist exhibition.

Manet spent the summer 1874 at his family property in Gennevilliers, near Paris. Claude Monet, whom Manet had helped to find a house after the war in 1871, was staying at Argenteuil. For Manet, visiting the Monet family was as simple as crossing the bridge over the Seine. One warm July day Manet found Claude with his wife and their son Jean in the garden and proceeded to paint the attractive family scene. Monet, as well as Renoir, who happened to visit just at that moment, remembered how Manet had painted as Monet watered the flowers, Camille sat under a tree with her son, and chickens walked around the lawn. *The Monet Family in their Garden at Argenteuil* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art) was Manet's first painting whose main subject was the light, which is not surprising because it was the first time Manet had painted directly in the open air. The light provides maximal accentuation of the colour of the grass, the red and green contrasts, and the shadows cast by the bright blue sky over white clothes. Manet nevertheless still uses flat areas of uniform colour. The painting recalls Monet's landscapes of the late 1860s, when his coloured brushstrokes were not yet broken. Monet's individuality as a painter was so strong that even a master as independent-minded as Manet was unable to ignore him. This was the summer that Manet painted two of his Impressionist paintings. Neither painting was purely landscape and although the paintings customarily had no theme, they reflected Manet's life at the time.

Manet's first Impressionist painting, *Boating* (p. 77), depicts Suzanne Manet's brother, Rodolphe Leenhoff, with a lady in a scene typical of late-nineteenth-century Paris. The favourite amusement of young Parisians on Sunday afternoons was to sail the Seine. People could rent boats in every Parisian suburb – Chatou, Bougival, Asnières, and Argenteuil. Sporty young men wearing bathing suits that accentuated their robust bodies led pretty young girls in light-coloured summer dresses seated under their parasols. The composition of this painting takes a bigger step forward than *The Luncheon*. The boat is cut off by the lower edge of the canvas as the viewer looks at the figures as if he was seated among them in the boat; in other words, the viewer finds himself completely included in the life of the painting. From a lower perspective, the sky and the opposite river bank of the Seine are out of range. Japanese artists, well known by Manet and whose work he had studied through prints,

Edouard Manet,
In the Garden, 1870.
Oil on canvas, 44.5 x 54 cm.
The Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont.

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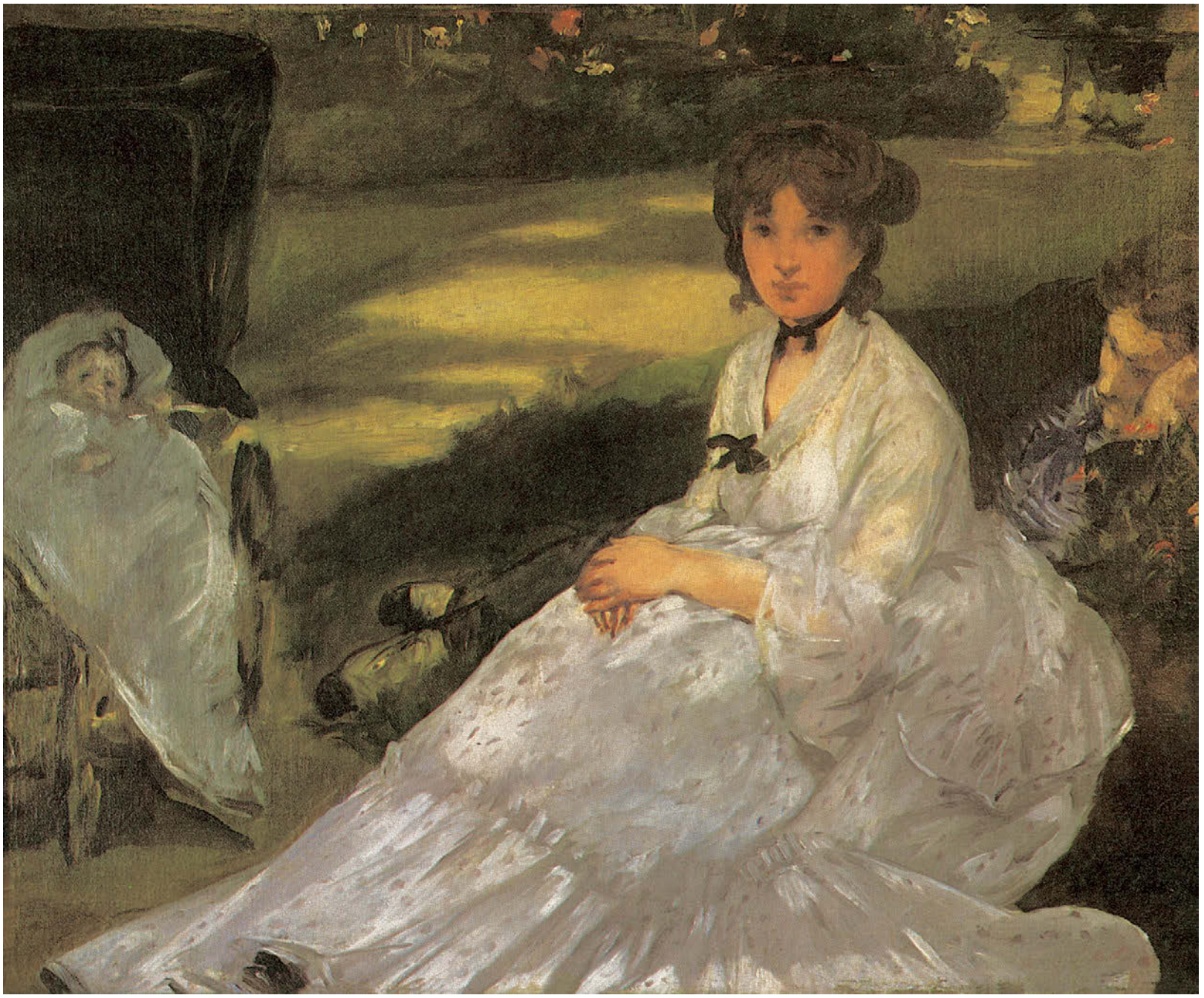

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constructed perspective by the same method. The background of the painting is made up of the surface of water. The contrast on the one hand between the white bathing suit, the yellow boater, and the pink body and on the other hand, the cold tone of the water, evokes the sunlight that the Impressionists learned to capture so well. The shimmering white brushstrokes and the woman's light blue dress are reminiscent of the coloured shadows and reflections in the painting of Monet and Renoir. Nevertheless, Manet paints the surface of the river as usual in a single, uniformly flat colour. It is more like a piece of undulating silk fabric, without variation apart from the thin, sinuous streaks of lead white. Manet's water lacks the multi-coloured moiré effect of Monet's canvases of the same period.

Manet's second Impressionist painting was *Argenteuil* (Tournai, Musée des Beaux-Arts). The same characters, Rodolphe Leenhoff and his partner are seated on the riverbank in the midst of boats, which bob up and down around them. Their striped clothing creates such a shimmering effect of colour on the canvas that this alone gives the painting an Impressionist appearance. Here, the landscape is rightfully part of the composition and becomes immediately impressionistic. The water is painted with broken brushwork and reflects the blue sky, the green trees, and the buildings of Argenteuil on the other bank. Nevertheless, Manet's symmetrical construction, which is strictly based on the classical ideal, distinguishes it from the compositions of Renoir and Degas. This may be largely due to the fact that Manet wanted to exhibit this painting in the Salon. But the painter never managed to render the fleeting nature of the scene captured on canvas, which marked the work of the Impressionists. As for the landscape, it seems that the Impressionist discoveries pleased Manet. In 1875, he visited Venice with his wife and the painter James Tissot. From this trip, we only have two views of the Grand Canal, painted during the final days. "He was at the point of abandoning them and returning to Paris on the last afternoon of his stay," an eyewitness said. "He took a rather small canvas and went out on the Grand Canal to do a study as a souvenir of his stay; he told me that he was so pleased with the result of this work, that he decided to stay another day to finish it." (L. W. Havemeyer, *Sixteen to Sixty. Memoirs of a collector*, New York, 1961, p. 226). The alternation of nervous touches of colour make the oscillating water and light constantly change. Manet acquired the conviction that by working en plein-air, he managed to achieve the effect of nature's constant movement, just as the Impressionists had done.

Manet regularly mixed with the Impressionists during these years. The cafés of Paris were his meeting places with painters, critics, and writers. The great caricaturist, Honoré Daumier, friend of Daubigny and Corot, had drawn this strange and amazing Paris in which it was their lot to live. Daumier's drawings depict workers standing on the rooves of old houses demolishing them with pickaxes, while citizens of Paris walking on the Champs-Elysées fall into ditches and step aside to avoid the beams hurtling past above their heads. The old Paris was lost to the past; the memory of the medieval city with ramparts and narrow streets only survived in the novels of Alexander Dumas. The mid-nineteenth century city, however, remained historically associated with the name of Baron Haussmann. For seventeen years, Paris was governed by the prefect Haussmann, or as the press called him, "Pasha Haussmann," the "great baron," and the "Louis XIV of the city of Paris." A grand plan for reconstructing the capital is attached to his name. A network of spacious boulevards cut through the old streets, creating the necessary conditions for the

Edouard Manet,
Argenteuil, 1874.
Oil on canvas, 148.9 x 115 cm.
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Tournai.

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active life and traffic that was only natural for the capital of France. On the right bank, boulevards circled in an endless ribbon, changing name en route. On these new boulevards, it was not as easy to quickly erect barricades as it had been in the old city, an issue that had to be taken into consideration in mid-nineteenth-century France, where revolutions followed one after the other. Of course, it was possible to miss the romantic character of the old streets, but the city had to find a new dignity.

In the centre of Paris, buildings arose to satisfy the needs of the bourgeoisie that had become rich after the revolution in the late eighteenth century. The first department stores and hotels made their appearance. In 1873, a fire destroyed the building that housed the opera and the Grand Opera was built according to the plans of the architect Garnier. The city clothed itself in green. The Monceau park that had been a sort of capricious fantasy of the Duke of Chartres, was transformed into an imposing public park with large tree-lined avenues and encircled by luxurious townhouses whose own gardens were indiscernible from it. Its planner, the engineer Alphand, in 1863 completed another admirable Haussmann project: at the site of the medieval chalk pits, where at this time there was an enormous city dump, he planned a romantic garden with mounds, a lake, and extravagant pavilions: Les Buttes-Chaumont.

Edouard Manet,

Monet Painting on His Studio Boat, 1874.

Oil on canvas, 80 x 98 cm.

Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

During this period in Paris, train stations were appearing one after the other. The capital of France was not only linked to the countryside, but it was ready to receive interminable waves of tourists. These train stations were found in the midst of residential areas that were springing up around them with amazing speed. The trains left a trail of smoke behind them and the din of the wheels was still audible long after the train had passed. This constant agitation, the noise, and soot in the centre of the city were unusual and self-respecting bourgeois Parisians considered it an affront. Manet had a different reaction to these changes. In 1872, he established his studio at 4, rue de Saint-Pétersbourg next to the train tracks from the west. That autumn he painted the *The Railway, St Lazare Station,* (Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art). There is nothing upsetting or shocking in this plein-air composition. The railroad is separated from the figures in the painting by ironwork and the train entering the Saint-Lazare station has enveloped the urban landscape with a curtain of white smoke, through which the buildings are barely visible. Manet was no fan of the new urban aesthetic, he simply accepted it. Victorine Meurent, who just returned from the United States, posed for Manet again after a ten-year hiatus. The figures in the painting, Victorine in a deep blue dress, a white puppy on her knees, and a little girl in a white dress with a blue ribbon bow, made a bizarre pair if one tried to fathom the subject. In fact, there was no

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subject. There was only the city, which, despite all the reconstruction, was still romantic in Manet's eyes. And there was Victorine with her milky white skin and red hair. All these elements combined formed a pictorial motif for a painting. And as if to emphasise his pictorial logic, the artist painted on the ironwork a bunch of grapes, which only served to provide a dash of colour.

Much use was being made of superior new steel frames in the construction of train stations. They later caught the attention of Monet, in whose painting of Saint-Lazare station the openwork of the steel frame plays a significant aesthetic role. But Manet paid little attention to steel frames, even if they occupied an increasingly important place in the city's architecture. They were also used for the new covered market in the very centre of the city, in the shadow of the huge church Saint-Eustache on the right bank. "The Emperor, much taken with Gare de l'Est, which was just finished …conceived the central market built after this type of hall covered by a roof structure made of a glass and iron that shelters train arrivals and departures," relates Baron Haussmann in his memoirs. "I must have these giant umbrellas and nothing else!" he told me one day…while sketching the silhouette he had in mind with a few pencil strokes… I took the scrap of paper that contained the noble idea." As he handed over these sketches to the architect Baltard, Haussmann told him, "Make me a design according to these notes as soon as possible. Iron, iron, nothing but iron!" (Georges-Eugene Haussmann, *Mémoires*, t. 3). It was impossible not to feel the loss of the old Paris, along with Baudelaire: "Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville / Change plus vite, hélas ! que le cœur d'un mortel)" ("*The old Paris is no more 'the shape of a city / Changes faster, alas! than the heart of a mortel'*") (Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, « Tableaux parisiens, 89, Le Cygne », Paris, 2002, p. 140).

Edouard Manet,
Boating, 1874.
Oil on canvas, 97.2 x 130.2 cm.
H. O. Havemeyer Collection,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Nevertheless, Manet and the Impressionists felt completely at ease in the Paris of their era. Manet's Paris was the right bank, the quarter of grand boulevards, new train stations, and the hills of Montmartre. That was where he lived and rented a studio. That was where he was visited by the Goncourt brothers searching for a piece of the Paris art world they could use in their novels. The cafés where his friends could meet him every night were close by. Beginning in the mid 1860s, it was the café de Bade, at 32, boulevard des Italiens, which was replaced in 1866 by the tranquility of the little café Guerbois, at 9, avenue de Clichy. In 1868, Manet invited Monet and his friends to café Guerbois. Everyone went there on Monday nights. Even the famous Nadar. Café Guerbois was continuously home to writers and critics (Astruc, Zola, Duranty, Silvestre), as well as painters (Degas, Fantin-Latour, Desboutin).

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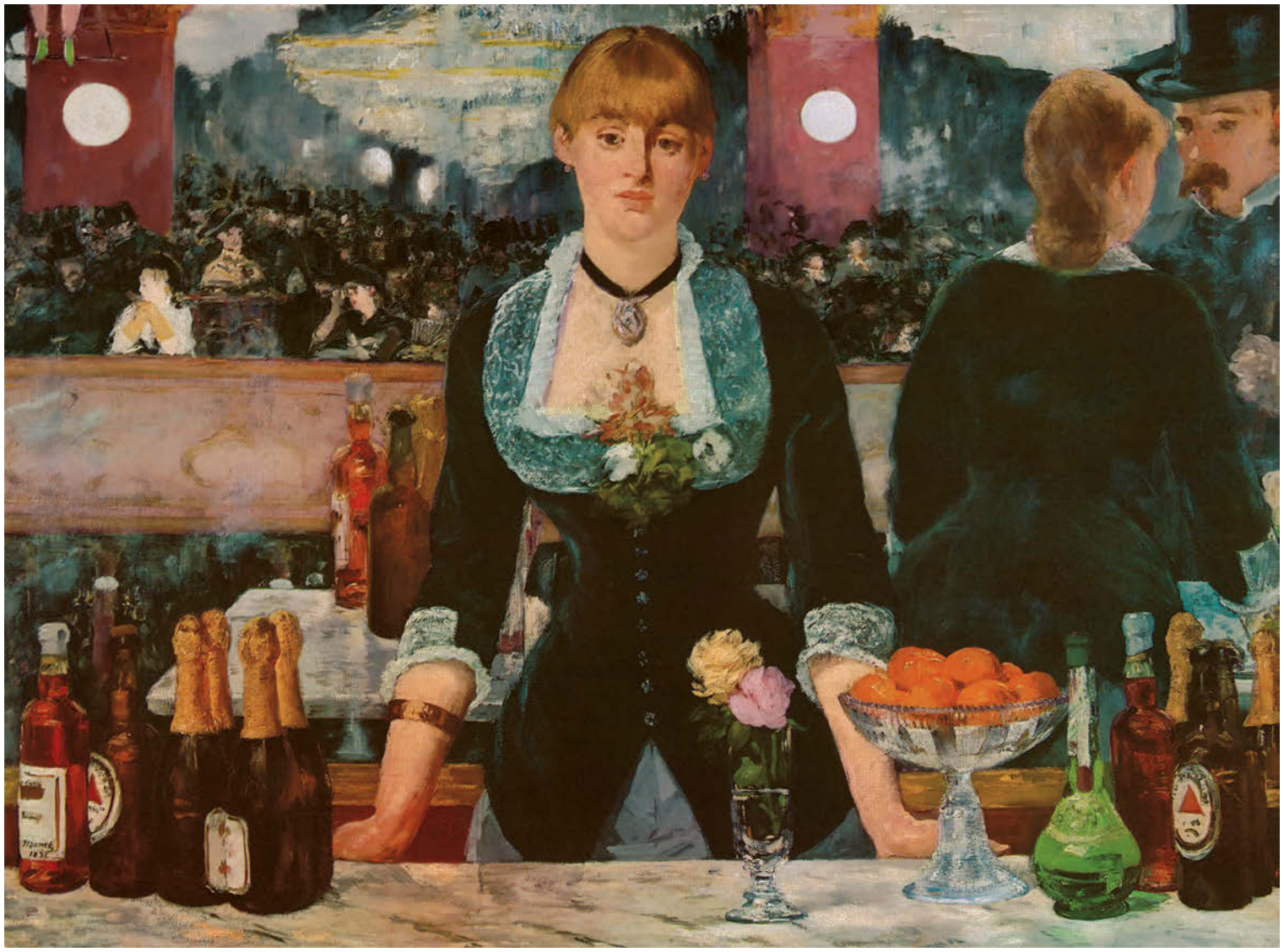

Edouard Manet,

A Bar at the Folies-Bergère, 1882.

Oil on canvas, 96 x 130 cm.

Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery, London.

It was there that Manet depicted the engraver Belleau in *Bock Drinkers*. And Manet's childhood friend, Antonin Proust, often came there. Much later, he preferred journalism to painting, entered politics and in 1881, for two months even held the position of minister of fine arts and architecture. Contemporaries remembered that the café Guerbois was always the site of debates, at the centre of which was Manet. The poet Théodore de Banville wrote a poem that may be paraphrased as follows: "The smiling, blond Manet emanated grace. Happy, subtle, all in all charming, and with a handsome beard, he was a gentleman from head to toe." (Dominique Bona, *Berthe Morisot*, Paris, 2000, p. 93). In these discussions, Manet showed himself to be ironic and sometimes even cruel, his words were paralysing and his observations were always right. His worthy rival was the witty Degas, who had impeccable knowledge. Of Monet's group, only Bazille had the audacity to participate in these exchanges with Manet. The most skilful and the most invincible debater was Duranty. One of his arguments with Manet ended in a duel. The critic Paul Alexis recalls how, being completely ignorant about fencing, they set upon each other with such fury that when the four witnesses succeeded in separating them their swords had been transformed into spirals. That same night they were back to being the world's best friends. On another occasion, their friends witnessed a violent altercation between Manet and Degas, after which they took back paintings that they had previously given each other as gifts.

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In 1872, with Paris recovering from the war, Manet's group relocated to a café called La Nouvelle Athènes, on place Pigalle. Not all the regulars from the café Guerbois made the transition. Bazille had been killed in the war; Monet and Sisley were living in the suburbs; and Pissarro only stopped by when he found himself in Paris. Cézanne's rare appearances were seen as theatre. Duranty wrote to Zola that Cézanne made a strong impression on all present when he came to La Nouvelle Athènes wearing a blue smock, a paint-splattered white shirt, and a shapeless old hat. In 1876, Degas painted *In a Café* (*The Absinthe Drinker*) (p. 220) outside La Nouvelle Athènes for which the actress Ellen Andrée and the engraver Marcellin Desboutin posed. (Manet painted his own large portrait of Desboutin (Sao Paulo, Museu de arte) in 1875). Manet also depicted Ellen Andrée at a small table at La Nouvelle Athènes in the painting entitled *The Plum Brandy* (Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art). Friends said that the artist painted his model in the studio where he had a small marble table, but is obviously painted from life. As always with Manet, light played the decisive role. The play of the corsage's reflections in the bluish marble table, combined with the beer glass, created an extraordinarily beautiful range of colour in this canvas. On the other hand, *The Plum* is part of a series of paintings by Manet that his contemporaries described as the "naturalist series," in which the painter depicted the social and artistic milieu that he, along with the writers of the "naturalist" school (the Gouncourt brothers, Zola, and others) belonged to.

Edouard Manet,
At the Café, c. 1879.
Oil on canvas, 47.3 x 39.1 cm.
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

Edouard Manet,
The Beer Waitress, 1878.
Oil on canvas, 77.5 x 65 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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Urban life, with its typical characters and his preferred Parisian haunts was integrated into Manet's painting beginning with his first canvases, such as *The Street Singer* and *Luncheon on the Grass*. Painted in 1873-1874, the small canvas known as the *Masked Ball at the Opera* (p. 83) marks and symbolises the end of Manet's plein-air Impressionist period and his return to urban motifs. Every year in late March a costume ball was organised at the Opera, which was followed several days later by a masked ball for the artistic public. In 1865, a scandal broke out due to a piece by the Goncourt brothers called, *Henriette Maréchal*. Edmond de Goncourt felt that the first act of this play, when the action takes place in a ball, had inspired Manet's painting, the other source of inspiration being (as usual) Spanish painting. Manet reproduces the solemn rhythm of the black mourning clothes in El Greco's *The Burial of Count Orgaz* (Tolède, Santo Tome), but transforms it here to accompany the bright lights of the celebration. Just as in *Music in the Tuileries Gardens*, Manet assembles the people who formed his entourage in Parisian society. There is no longer any trace of a minutely constructed composition. The viewer gets the impression that the painter is depicting a fragment of life glimpsed by chance. The figures are cut off by the borders of the canvas and above, the coquettish leg of a woman is visible, straddling the balcony balustrade.

Nana (Hamburg, Kunsthalle), painted in 1877, also echoes naturalist literature: Manet's *Nana* was associated with the heroine of the same name in Zola's novel *Nana*, although the novel was published a year after Manet completed the painting. If contemporaries suspected Manet's enigmatic Olympia was a courtesan, his *Nana* made no effort to hide the fact. In Zola's novel, she conducts herself as she does in Manet's painting: "starting in the morning she spends hours in her slip before the piece of mirror hung above the chest of drawers." (Emile Zola, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris 1960-1967, t. 2, p. 710). But the situation of an old man waiting on a sofa for a beautiful blonde in elegant lingerie was so typical of Parisian life that Manet could have painted it without reading Zola's novel. The painting is carefully constructed as a balanced composition with each detail weighed. And yet the painting's loose and "careless" style with its sketch-like appearance reveals that Manet's contemporaries continued to associate with Impressionism. Manet's extraordinary colour sense is also evident in this painting. The palette is based on a combination of the gold depicted in the models hair and wooden sofa frame and the sky blue of the Japanese fabric that Manet often used in his paintings. The painter is openly seduced by the demimonde lifestyle, with which he was familiar, finding in it a typically Parisian charm and elegance. Therefore it is not surprising that on 1 May, 1877, on the opening day of the Salon, Manet exhibited his *Nana* in the sumptuous window of Giroux, a merchant on the boulevard des Capucines : the painting itself was a natural part of Parisian life in that era.

Manet was already ill at this time. Physicians were prescribing various treatments for him, sending him to water cures, but his health continued to deteriorate. He kept on working. Some of his paintings appeared in exhibits in Besançon and Marseille, New York and Boston. The publisher Georges Charpentier was organising entertaining exhibitions of colourful drums and painted ostrich eggs in his gallery, La Vie moderne, and Manet was happy to participate. In December 1881, Manet was made chevalier of the Legion of Honour. In 1882, he turned fifty. When the Salon opened that May as usual, Parisians went to see his final painting: *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (p. 78).

Edouard Manet,
Masked Ball at the Opera, 1873.
Oil on canvas, 59.1 x 72.5 cm.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

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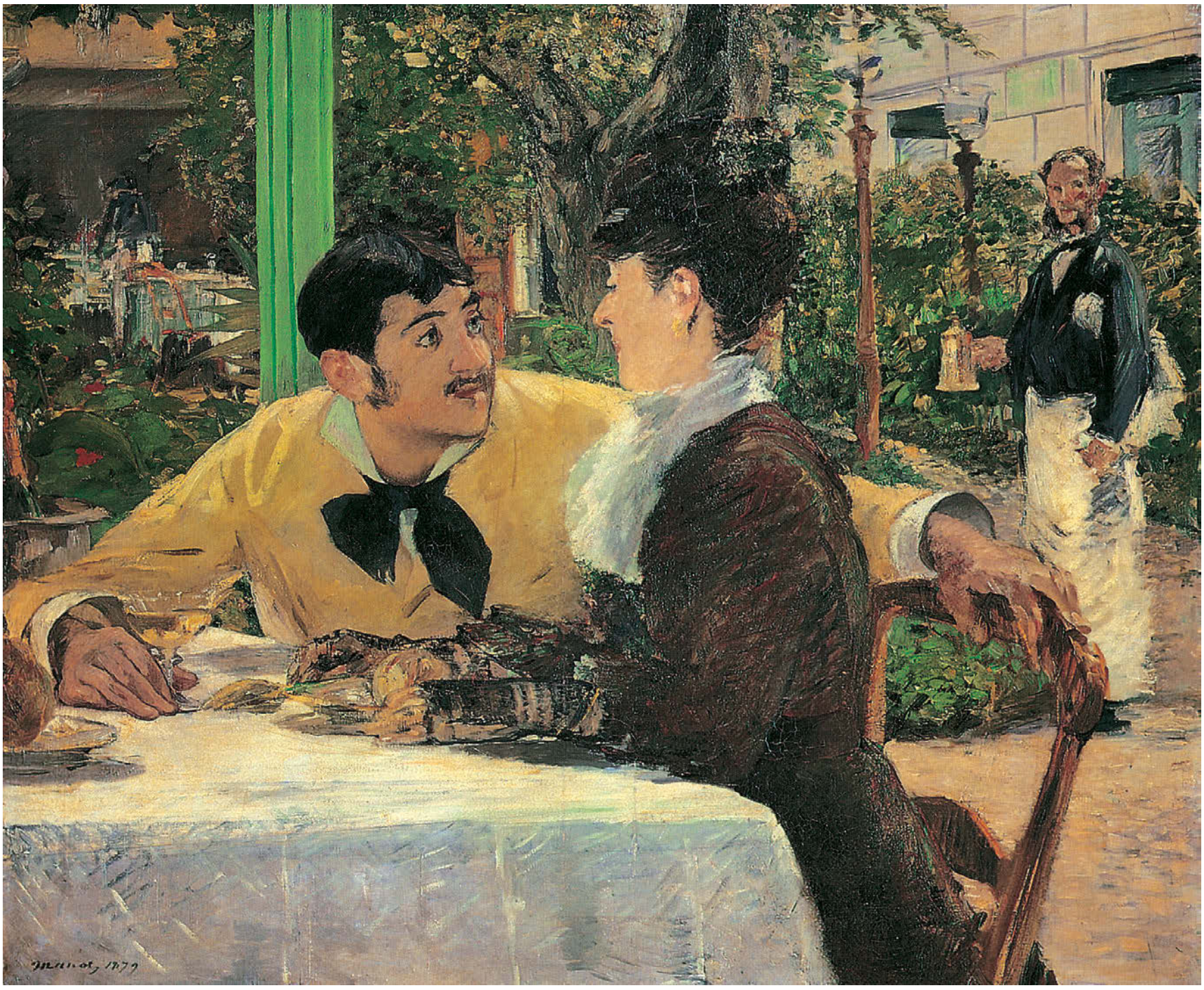

Edouard Manet,
At Father Lathuile's, 1879.
Oil on canvas, 92 x 112 cm.
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Belgium.

The beautiful barmaid with the golden fringe and pale pink complexion represented the type of model that Manet loved so: the type of Victorine Meurent and the actress Henriette Hauser, who had posed for *Nana*. She leans over a marble bar enhanced with an admirable still life. Ordinary glass bottles sparkle like precious stones. Golden champagne corks complement orange mandarins; glass wine bottles match a green carafe. Manet paints the two roses, one yellow and one pink, by freely placing large marks on the canvas, without the use of any modelling. It was enough to make them bloom, because a real petal gently falls on the marble counter. With a few lead white highlights, almost carelessly executed, Manet makes a glass stand out against the background of the young girl's blue velvet jacket. Behind the barmaid's back is the hustle and bustle of the dining area, illuminated by huge crystal chandeliers. As usual, Manet fills his canvas with friends. Méry Laurent (*Autumn*) observes the scene as she leans against a railing; Jeanne Demarsy (*Spring*) sits behind her.

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The women's light coloured outfits stand out against the men's black clothing. In the upper left corner, one can make out the legs of an acrobat on her trapeze. And it is only after a certain amount of time that the viewer begins to realise that there is no restaurant or any figures on this canvas: the artist has depicted an enormous mirror. The young girl stands facing the dining room, which is reflected in the mirror and which is where the viewer also finds himself. Manet's painting represents the culmination of his research in the area of composition: real space completely merges with painting space. Reflected in the mirror is the young girl's back and the silhouette of the young man she is talking to, which also represents the spectator.

The café-concert of the Folies-Bergère, recently opened in Paris, became a fashionable spot in the early 1880s. The most diverse audience could be found there, from members of high society to the charming women of the demimonde that Manet so loved to paint. In 1881, Manet made a small study

Edouard Manet,
In the Conservatory, 1879.
Oil on canvas, 115 x 150 cm.
Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

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at the bar of the Folies-Bergère depicting the military painter Henry Dupray in conversation with a blonde barmaid (Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum). But this was just a preliminary sketch for the composition. The painting greatly departed from this sketch after nature. It was no coincidence that contemporaries noted the young girl's sad expression. The painting was probably Manet's true farewell to gay Parisian society, a farewell to his friends and to all that he had loved. Physicians were unsuccessful in relieving him and his condition was only worsening. He had painted the bar in his studio, where a marble counter had been placed and where an actual barmaid from Folies-Bergère had been asked to come pose. The young girl was named Suzon and Manet made a beautiful portrait sketch of her. But it was getting more and more difficult to work. Often he had to lay down his paintbrush and rest. A young painter named G. Jeanniot, visited Manet in his studio in January, 1892. As he told it: "He was painting *At the Bar at the Folies-Bergère* then and the model, a pretty young girl, was posing behind a table with bottles and provisions. He immediately noticed me and took my hand, saying, 'It's rude, forgive me, I must stay seated, my foot hurts'…Other people came and Manet stopped painting to go sit on the sofa…That's when I noticed how much the illness had exhausted him. He nevertheless remained cheerful and talked about his imminent recovery." (*Manet*, *op. cit.* p. 482). Manet spent the summer of 1882 with his family in Rueil. Already nearly immobilised by the illness, he was painting sunny landscapes and floral bouquets in the garden after nature. He stayed optimistic and even asked the painter Francis Defeuille to give him lessons in miniature, an art he had yet to pursue. A medical examination in April 1883 revealed the need to amputate Manet's left leg due to gangrene. The amputation took place on 20 April and ten days later, on 30 April, the day before the opening of the new Salon, Manet passed away. The critic G. Geffroy wrote in Manet's obituary that the celebration of the opening of the Salon was dampened by this strange coincidence. Manet died young, at the peak of his talent, just as he had begun to experience success.

Manet left a will, according to which his inheritors were his wife Suzanne followed by Léon Leenhoff. He made Théodore Duret responsible for selling or destroying everything that was left in his studio. Manet was convinced that in one hundred years people would be more intelligent and that they would know how to see and appreciate real art, in other words, his own painting and that of the Impressionists. He never forgot his friends and tried his best to support them: "Perhaps you do not yet like this painting", he wrote in 1877 to the critic A. Wolff, "but you will like it." (*Manet*, *op. cit.*, p. 515). In his preface to the catalogue of the posthumous Manet exhibition in 1884, Zola said that great masters are judged by the influence they have exerted. Manet painted his own milieu, while the proponent of a new and radiant painting. Under his influence, a ray of sunlight illuminated exhibitions in Paris. Shortly before his death, Manet asked Antonin Proust to prevent his paintings from being dispersed among different hands and museums, otherwise in the future people would be unable to truly appreciate them. Nevertheless, life went on and after the exhibition there was a sale of Manet's paintings at the hotel Drouot, which brought in the tidy sum of 72,000 francs. But Manet's friends wanted to see his paintings in the Louvre. A share plan was declared. Monet, Renoir, Caillebotte, Duret and others purchased Manet's *Olympia* and donated it to the Louvre. By the personal order of President Clemenceau, the painting was transferred from the Musée du Luxembourg, where it had been since 1890, to the Louvre, where it was hung opposite Ingres's *Large Odalisque*.

Edouard Manet,

Nana, 1877.

Oil on canvas, 154 x 115 cm.

Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

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Claude Monet (1840-1926)

"I am, and I always wish to be, an Impressionist"

For Claude Monet the designation "Impressionist" always remained a source of pride. In spite of all the things critics have written about his work, Monet continued to be a true Impressionist to the end of his very long life. He was so by deep conviction and, for his Impressionism, he may have sacrificed many of the other opportunities his enormous talent held out for him. Monet did not paint classical compositions with figures, and he did not become a portraitist, although his professional training included those skills. He chose a single genre for himself, landscape painting, and in that he achieved a degree of perfection none of his contemporaries managed to attain. Claude Monet loved Normandy passionately, and always considered it his true country. Yet he was born in Paris, on Rue Lafitte, and baptised Claude Oscar on 14 November 1840. In 1845, when Claude was five years old, his father opened a small store in Le Havre. The austere Normandy coastline, its cliffs eroded by the sea, the tiny sails of the boats on the immense ocean, the hospitable bays of Dieppe, Fécamp, and d'Honfleur, and the ceaseless activity of the port at Le Havre – all of this would remain close to Monet's heart throughout his life, and it is here that the roots of his landscape painting are to be found. Yet the little boy began by drawing caricatures. He copied them from newspapers and magazines – caricature playing a central role in France's political life during the mid-nineteenth century – or drew portraits for which his neighbours paid him. From the outset what is striking about these caricatures is the maturity and proficiency of the drawing, as well as a degree of experience surprising in a young man of eighteen. It is true that at sixteen years old Monet was already taking drawing classes with professor François-Charles Ochard, a former student of the famed David. But the way his models are individualised, the accuracy of the drawing, and the clever simplification of the figures' distinctive traits all testified to the artist's brilliant individuality and to his talent, which went beyond the modest abilities of a copyist. He signed his drawings "Claude". There was a frame shop next to his father's store, and its display window became the site of Monet's first exhibitions. A local painter by the name of Eugène Boudin also exhibited there.

Boudin's seascapes seemed baffling and repellent to Monet, as they did to many others. All the same, this odd painter took note of the drawings done by Monet, still almost a child at the time. One day, as Monet recalled it, Boudin told him that he always enjoyed looking at his caricatures, that they were funny, and drawn with intelligence and fluency. Boudin believed Monet's talent was obvious at first glance, but that he should not let it rest there. He still needed to learn to see, to paint, and to draw. Boudin advised Monet to stop doing caricatures and to take up landscapes instead. The sea, the sky, animals, people, and trees are beautiful in the exact state in which nature created them – surrounded by air and light. For Boudin himself, painting meant landscapes alone. He felt a warm attachment and a great sense of responsibility towards Monet. He explained to his young colleague that the romantics had seen their day and that now one had to work in a different way. The charm of Boudin's own canvases came from their spontaneity. When he endeavoured to complete a landscape successfully it lost that sincerity which, in his small studies, could make the viewer feel the cool gusts of the ocean breeze and the gentle rustling of shingles on the beach.

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Portrait of Claude Monet, 1875.
Oil on canvas, 85 x 60.5 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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Monet said later that Boudin's exhortations made no impact at first: he hardly paid attention to his words and always found an excuse not to go work with Boudin in the open air. He wasn't yet able to digest Boudin's strange, unusual work. Nevertheless, as Monet said himself, he liked this man. He had conviction, and he was sincere. During the summer Monet was relatively free and had run out of good excuses for declining Boudin's offer to work alongside him. The latter, in spite of everything, set about to oversee Monet's apprenticeship, and together they would paint studies along the seashore. "Eventually my eyes were opened," admitted Monet, "and I really understood nature. I learned to love at the same time" (D. Wildenstein, *Claude Monet*, Paris, 1974, p. 13). Boudin's own talent had developed in the same way, through direct contact with nature. He had previously been the owner of that same frame shop where Monet was exhibiting his caricatures. Boudin showed his own landscapes, painted on site in Normandy, in his display windows. He also sold painting materials for artists, and one day Jean François Millet came into his shop. With Millet's encouragement Boudin gave up his business and went to Paris. He copied from paintings at the Louvre and benefited from the advice of the Barbizon School painter Constant Troyon, as well as Manet's teacher Thomas Couture. All the same he received no systematic education and disappointed his benefactors with his steadfast attachment to landscapes, and his revulsion at painting in the traditional genres adopted by the schools. He returned to Le Havre to work in direct contact with nature. He was the decisive factor for Monet's future. Indeed, it was Boudin who passed on to Monet his conviction of the importance of working in the open air, which Monet would in turn transmit to his Impressionist friends.

Claude Monet,

Camille (Woman in a Green Dress), 1866.

Oil on canvas, 231 x 151 cm.

Kunsthalle Bremen, Bremen.

Claude Monet,

Portrait of Madame Gaudibert, 1868.

Oil on canvas, 217 x 138 cm.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Claude's parents refused to accept his vocation as a painter, and their son's relationship with the inexplicable Boudin troubled them. Finally they gave in. Since it was understood that he could not help his son materially, Claude's father wrote a letter to the municipal council of Le Havre asking that his son be given a scholarship to study in Paris, but he was refused. With his father's consent Claude went to Paris for two months in 1854, and stayed on a good deal longer. The city fascinated him, the Louvre was inexhaustible, and the exhibits by modern painters stimulated his thinking about the future of art. On Boudin's recommendation he showed his work to Troyon, who reproached Monet for being much too facile. For Troyon this signalled a lack of professionalism. "So, my dear friend, it's colour you're looking for. That's nothing but effect – " the Barbizon painter declared to him. "You need to pursue serious studies. Start by enrolling in a studio where they work from nothing but the figure, the academies. Learn to draw" (D. Wildenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 13). In spite of Troyon's advice, Monet didn't want to enrol at the Ecole des beaux-arts. He chose to attend a private school, L'Académie Suisse, established by an ex-model on the Quai d'Orfèvres near the Pont Saint-Michel. One could draw and paint from a live model there for a modest fee. This was where Monet met the future Impressionist Camille Pissarro. But the stay in Paris was interrupted; the time for military service had come. Monet's father promised his son to purchase a draft surrogate if he would give up painting. But Monet remained inflexible and left for Algeria with the African regiment. Subsequently

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Claude Monet,
The Bridge at Argenteuil, 1874.
Oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

he would recall how much the discovery of these regions fascinated him – as it had fascinated Delacroix in his time. Claude was struck by the southern light, which brought out the beauty of the colours. He later said these impressions formed the basis for his future discoveries. Monet did not return from Algeria to his cherished Le Havre until 1862. His perseverance with his drawing finally persuaded Claude's parents of the seriousness of his vocation. Still, even in those early days, his behaviour perplexed them. A letter from Monet's aunt Madame Lecadre has been found in which she writes to a painter of her acquaintance in Paris that her nephew's student work consisted of nothing but summary studies, lacking in detail. When he wanted to finish something and make a painting of it, it all turned into a hideous sort of daubing. And he himself thought this daubing was wonderful, and had found some idiots to complement him on it ! Nevertheless, Claude's parents sent him to attend classes with a rather fashionable Parisian painter, Auguste Toulmouche, a Monet family relative. After some time Toulmouche thought it essential that Monet attend the free studio run by his own teacher, Charles Gleyre. It was there in Gleyre's studio that Monet met Pierre Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley, and Frédéric Bazille. Monet considered it very important that Boudin be introduced to his new friends. He wrote Boudin from Paris that a little group of young landscapists had formed at the studio, and that they would be happy to meet with him. He also told his friends of another painter he had found in Normandy. This was the remarkable Dutchman Jongkind. His landscapes were saturated with colour, and their sincerity, at times even their naïvete, was combined with subtle observation of the Normandy shore's variable nature. Monet remembered that Jongkind explained to him all the "whys and wherefores" of his style, rounding out the education he had received from Boudin. "From that moment on he was my true master," said Monet.

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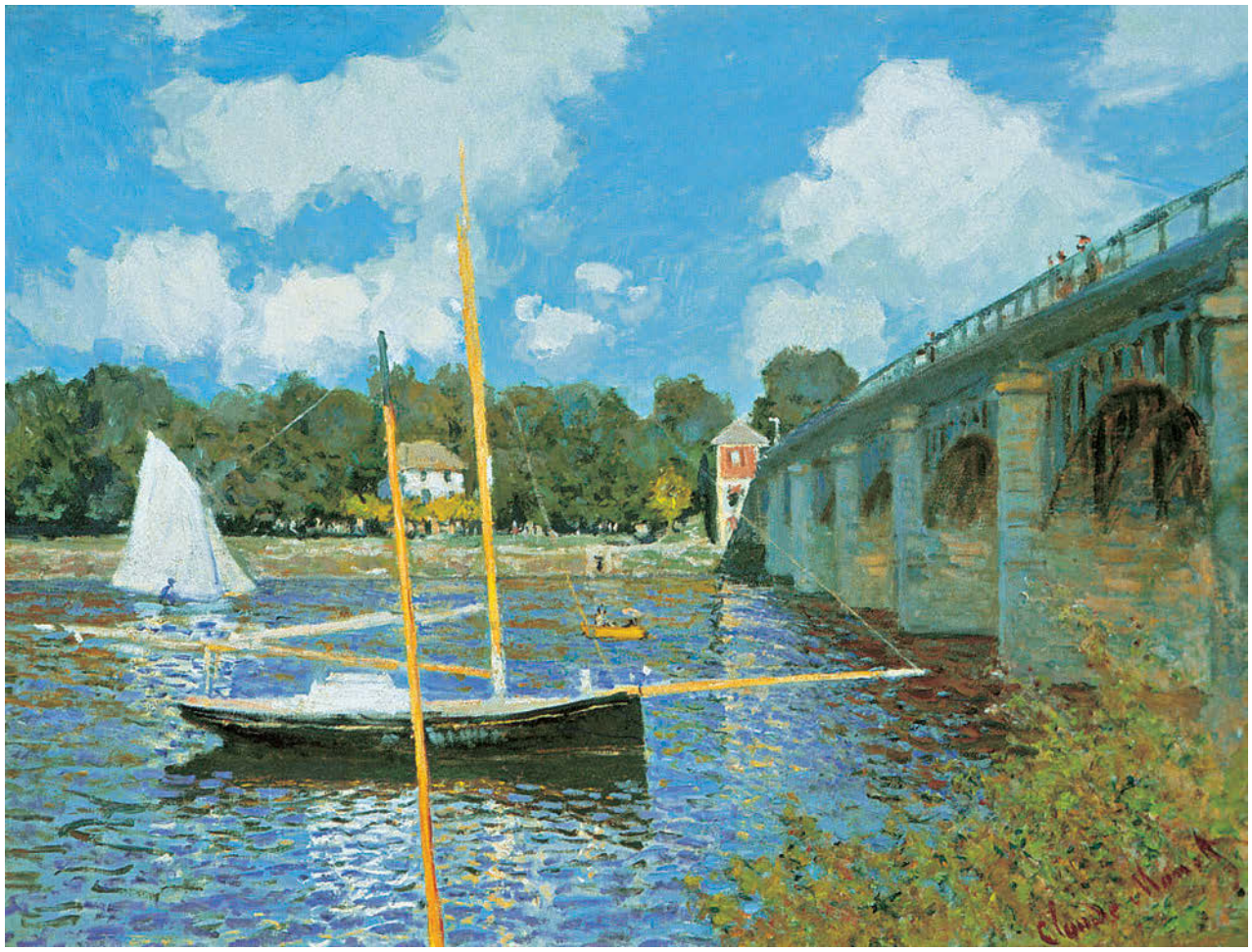

Claude Monet,
The Bridge at Argenteuil, 1874.
Oil on canvas, 60 x 79.7 cm.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

"I owe the final education of my eye to him" (D. Wildenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 14). The Normandy landscape painters Boudin and Jongkind rank among the Impressionists' direct influences.

From the moment they met at Gleyre's studio the young painters moved forward together, casting the weight of the classical tradition off their shoulders. These future Impressionists shared the same objectives and ideas, and together they developed their method of painting. Their contemporaries perceived their painting as a single whole. In 1873, before the first Impressionists' exhibition, the critic Arman Sylvestre wrote about the exhibition at the art dealer Durand-Ruel's gallery: "At first glance one has trouble distinguishing the paintings of M. Monet from M. Sisley, and the latter's style from that of M. Pissarro. After a bit of study one learns that M. Monet is the most skilful and the most daring, M. Sisley is the most harmonious and most timid, and M. Pissarro is the most authentic and the most naïve" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 284). Among the landscape painters Monet's originality was undoubtedly the deepest. Monet worked tirelessly, with care and perseverance. But it was difficult to appreciate this at the very start, given the young man's eccentric appearance. "When he first came to the studio the students, jealous of his magnificent appearance, nicknamed him 'the dandy'," Renoir told his son. "He didn't have a dime, and he wore shirts with lace cuffs" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 122). It amused Monet to shock his fellow students – and Gleyre himself. He refused the stool provided by the studio, tossing it aside casually. "Good for milking cows !" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 122). One day Gleyre caught him on the platform where the model was posing, and where only the professor had the right to go. "I need to be close, to get the grain of the skin," (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 122) he explained to the professor. Apart from his companions, he saw none of the students outside the studio. He held most of them in frank contempt, calling them "grocers". Despite this they all gave him credit for his virtuosity and talent.

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Life was hard for the young painters. Monet had the knack of persuading bourgeois Parisians to commission him and Renoir to do their portraits, and in this way he managed to pay for the group studio, the model, and coal for the heating. At times there would be no commissions for months: fortunately one of their clients, a shopkeeper, paid them in groceries. A bag of beans was enough for about a month. "I must say," Renoir added, "that from time to time Monet came up with a dinner invitation, and we stuffed ourselves with turkey basted in fine Chambertin wine !" They were all young in those days, had few demands, and were full of exuberance. "None of this stopped Monet from going on wearing his lace shirts and using the best tailor in Paris," Renoir went on. "He never paid him. He responded to his bills with the arrogance and condescension of Don Juan receiving M. Dimanche. 'Monsieur, if you continue to insist in this way, I will withdraw my patronage.' And the tailor gave up, overwhelmed with pride to be clothing a gentleman with such manners. He was a born aristocrat !" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 124). Fortunately Frédéric Bazille was among them, and with the money his parents sent him he rented a studio for himself, Monet, Renoir, and Sisley. When Monet and Bazille had an apartment with a studio at Place Furstenburg, where Delacroix was living, Sisley and Renoir would come over at night. Pissarro brought Cézanne along with him. For some time this studio became their meeting place. They had stopped attending Gleyre's studio, and together they now left to work in the region favoured by the Barbizon School painters, the Fontainebleau forest. Lodgings were only to be had in the small village of Chailly-en-Bière, at the far end of the forest. It had only two hotels: the *Cheval Blanc* and the *Lion d'Or.* All four moved into the *Cheval Blanc*, run by old Paillard. It was a cozy hotel, decorated with the canvases left behind by painters who had stayed there. The friends set to work with zeal. "The forest is really superb in certain parts," Bazille wrote his

Claude Monet,
The Manneporte (Etretat), 1886.
Oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York.

Claude Monet,
Clifftop Walk at Pourville, 1882.
Oil on canvas, 66.5 x 82.3 cm.
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.

Claude Monet,
The Luncheon on the Grass, 1866.
Oil on canvas, 130 x 181 cm.
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts,
Moscow.

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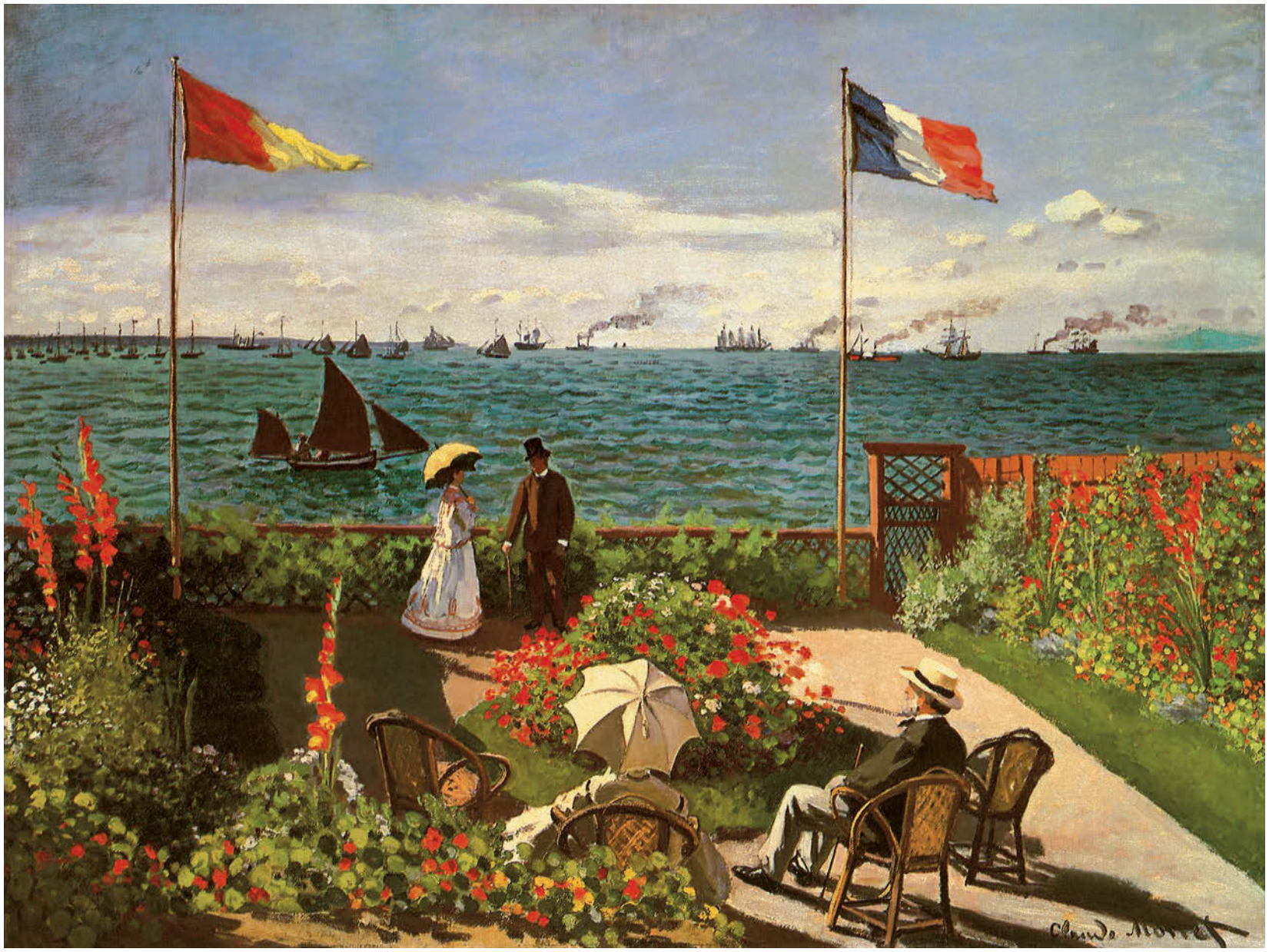

parents. “We’ve got nothing like these oak trees in Montpellier. The rocks are not as beautiful, despite their fine reputation” (F. Daulte, *op. cit.*, p. 35). Monet painted broad forest paths, lined with trees and bathed in sunlight. In these landscapes one senses the solid instruction Gleyre had managed to give them, almost against their will. Monet’s landscapes of this period inevitably bring Poussin’s paintings to mind. Constructed using the golden section, they are harmonious, balanced, and impeccably composed. As in Poussin, there are amply rounded mountain peaks, dense with trees. Nevertheless it was at that same time, in the Fontainebleau forest, that Monet first had a revelation of the richness of the colour effects created by the sun filtering through the leaves.

It was also at Chailly, in 1865, that Monet began to paint *Luncheon on the Grass*, inspired by Manet’s *Luncheon on the Grass*. The project was long in the planning, but he had revealed nothing of it to his friends. It was to be an enormous painting. When he got to Chailly, Monet moved into the *Lion d’Or* and stretched a canvas of one-and-a-half square yards. He didn’t have enough money to hire models, and kept asking Bazille to come join him. He wanted Bazille to pose for several figures at the same time, and begged his friend not to let him down. He wrote Bazille several letters full of passionate pleading, saying in one of them that if he didn’t make the painting he would lose his mind. Finally, Bazille came and posed for at least two figures: the young man with the hat, standing, and the one reclining on the grass. But it is highly

Claude Monet,

Garden at Sainte-Adresse, 1867.

Oil on canvas, 98 x 130 cm.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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likely that all the figures in the painting were done using Bazille. Things didn't proceed altogether smoothly. Monet broke a leg and was confined to his bed for a long period. But Bazille made use of this as a motif as well, painting Monet in his makeshift hospital. For the feminine figures, Camille Doncieux served as the model. Monet had just met this young girl, who before long would become his wife. The painting did not satisfy him, and Monet left it with the hotel's owner to pay his debts. In the studio at Place Furstenburg he stretched a canvas six yards long on a frame and set to work reproducing the composition he had finished at Chailly. The work dragged on for ages. Courbet paid a visit to the studio one day, and it is possible that, after hearing his observations, Monet abandoned the work. He rolled up the canvas, and later divided it into three pieces, two of which are now in the Musée d'Orsay. A smaller variant of this composition exists. Perhaps it is a preparatory study, but more likely it is a copy done later and signed by Monet, who dated it 1866 (Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts).

This painting had little in common with Edouard Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe,* apart from the motif of a picnic on the grass and the charm of an authentic landscape painted directly from nature. To judge from the remaining fragments, the canvas was rather dark. The static figures bring mannequins to mind. Monet had not yet got past the profusion of detail characteristic of genre painting. A young

Claude Monet,

The Luncheon, *Decorative panel*, 1868.

Oil on canvas, 160 x 201 cm.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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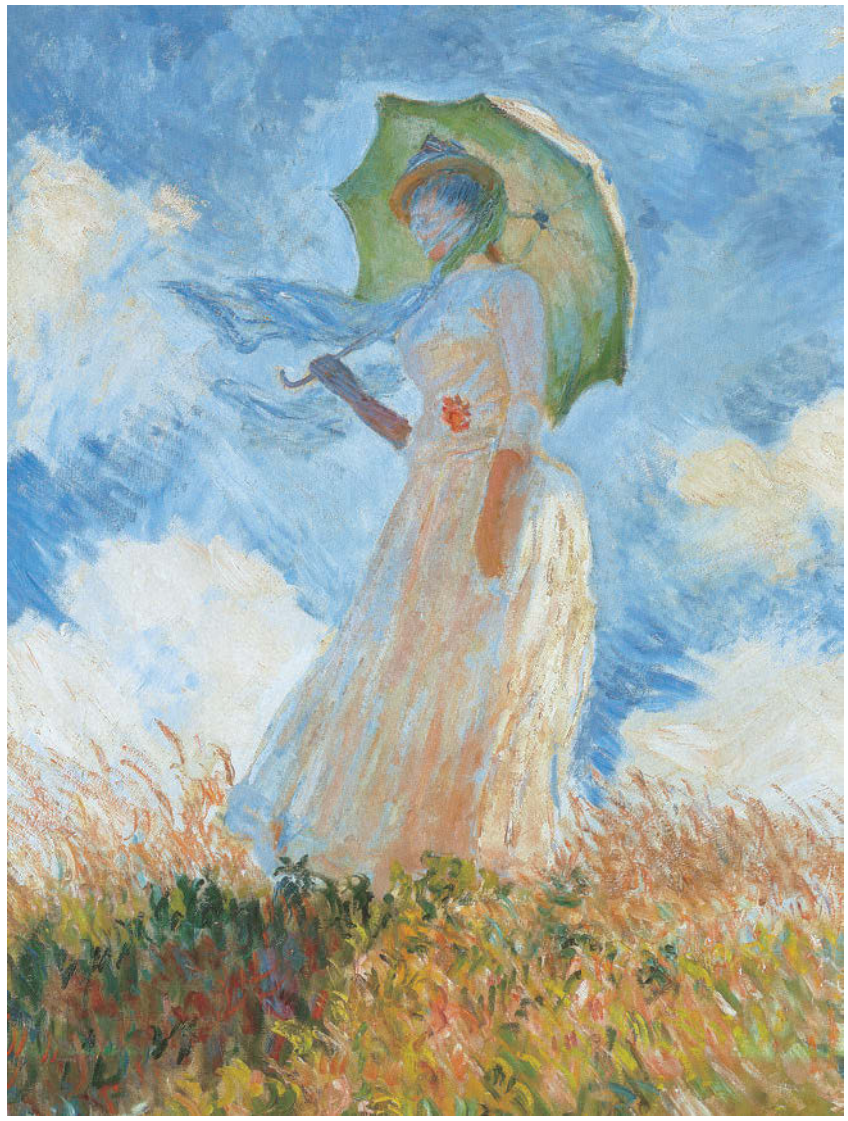

Claude Monet,
Study of a Figure in Open Air (Woman with Parasol Facing Right), 1886.
Oil on canvas, 131 x 88 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Claude Monet,
Study of a Figure in Open Air (Woman with Parasol Facing Left), 1886.
Oil on canvas, 131 x 88 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Claude Monet,
Woman with a Parasol – Madame Monet and Her Son, 1875.
Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

girl sets out the dishes on a tablecloth, and a dog is running in the foreground. Someone has carved initials and dates on the trunk of a birch tree, and behind it a young man is hiding. But already there is something here that points towards Monet's future: the sun, as it pierces through the greenery of the trees, fragments it into small, juxtaposed patches, and the coloured shadows on the women's elegant dresses are painted with pure colours. But the studies done at Chatou, near Paris, came even closer to what his future painting would be. In 1869, when he was working with Renoir at La Grenouillère, the water represented in his canvases began to crack into a multitude of shimmering touches of bright colour. It is the first appearance of that continual movement in nature that Monet would later be able to render so well. In 1866 Monet painted the portrait of Camille Doncieux, his future wife – *Woman in the Green Dress* (p. 88). It was an unexpected success and was taken note of by Zola, who had not yet met Monet. "There is more than a realist here, there is an interpreter of delicacy and intensity," he wrote in *l'Evénement*. "Look at the dress. It is supple and solid. It trails gently, it is alive. It says out loud who this woman is" (D. Wildenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 18). Yet, far more than this young, fashionable Parisian's social characteristics, or the art of representing fabrics, what points towards the Monet of the future is the colour. His painting is still rather dark, but the shimmering green in combination with the brown and the gold creates that "Spanish" range which all the future Impressionists admired at the time in Manet's paintings.

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Claude Monet,
Women in a Garden, 1861.
Oil on canvas, 255 x 205 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

During the 1860s Monet occasionally visited his parents' home in Normandy. He would sometimes go with Bazille to the farm in Saint-Siméon, where a sort of club foregathered in which Courbet and Baudelaire participated. They painted at the little port of Honfleur, which Boudin and all the other Normandy landscapists so loved. "As soon as we arrived in Honfleur we looked for landscape motifs," wrote Bazille to his parents. "They were easy to find, for the country here is paradise. One could not possibly see lusher meadows and more beautiful trees. Everywhere there are cows and horses roaming free. The sea, or rather the Seine greatly

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widened, provides a charming horizon for these torrents of greenery" (F. Daulte, *op. cit.*, p. 41). For Monet these were motifs that had been familiar and dear to him since childhood, and he would revisit them throughout his life. Naturally Monet introduced Bazille to his parents. "I have had lunch with Monet's family," Bazille wrote his mother. "They're charming people. They have a charming estate at Sainte-Adresse, near Le Havre (…) I had to refuse their gracious invitation to spend the month of August there" (F. Daulte, *op. cit.*, p. 41). Monet's parents shared this estate with his aunt Lecadre. Claude knew days of happiness there, but also of sorrow. His disagreements with his family were a source of continual distress for him. In 1864 he wrote Bazille, "What I've been telling you, about the break with my family, is going to happen any day now. Last night at Sainte-Adresse I was asked to leave and not to return anytime soon. I'm even afraid I won't be receiving any more money. With all the effort I'm putting forth now, that would truly be painful" (F. Daulte, *op. cit.*, p. 42). In 1867 Monet's father ordered him to spend the summer at Sainte-Adresse under his aunt's surveillance to keep him away from Camille, who was just about to give birth to their first son, Jean. His father threatened to withdraw financial support completely if he married. Monet was in despair, and in such a state of nervous agitation that he even began to lose his vision – the worst misfortune possible for a painter. He was fortunate to find a doctor in Le Havre who would treat him. All the same, Monet was under the spell of Sainte-Adresse, about which he wrote, "It's charming, and I'm discovering things still more beautiful every day. It's driving me mad, there's so much I feel like doing" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 21).

He painted a series of landscapes at Sainte-Adresse that brought him one step further towards Impressionism. Indeed, *Regattas at Sainte-Adresse* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art), *Terrace at Sainte-Adresse* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art), and *Woman in the Garden* (St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum) are all dated 1867. Monet painted a bright blue sea, rippling with tiny waves, with the vast Normandy sky as smooth as a mirror and sprinkled with clouds. Pure colours appear on his canvases, unmixed with one another. Red flowers shimmer in the green grass, coloured pennants flutter in the wind. Sunlight floods his paintings. Monet painted a wonderful garden, of the type that is the pride of Normandy. The owners of Normandy gardens rival one another over their plant arrangements, which alternate brilliantly coloured beds of flowers with small, scattered flowering trees against a background of green lawn.

Claude Monet loved these gardens, and took his inspiration from nature alone. One gets the impression in these paintings that he has set himself the goal of being a model student of Gleyre's. In *Dame dans le Jardin* the centre is marked by the red patch of the flowerbed and the vertical axis of the tree, in keeping with all the rules of the classical school. Sunlit shrubs on either side are set in relief against the dark greenery of the background. This time he asked his cousin Lecadre's wife to pose. She fills the role of the figure that, in classical paintings, serves to enliven the landscape. The lady in a white dress is standing under a white umbrella. But in Monet's painting the dress, instead of becoming grey beneath the umbrella, is a very pure sky blue. In 1867 Monet had already begun to analyse the colours he saw and had discovered what Delacroix, in his time, had found. It was that black and white do not exist in nature. There is colour everywhere, one only needs to be able to see it. For that purpose it is essential to educate, to train one's eye, and Monet made a start on this difficult task.

The close of the 1860s and the beginning of the 1870s were not an easy period for Claude Monet. In 1868 he finally married Camille Doncieux. Without his father's support, life with his family was proving very difficult. During the Franco-Prussian war and the Paris Commune he stayed in England. In London Monet

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met Pissarro and Charles-François Daubigny. Paul Durand-Ruel himself passed through London during the war period, and Daubigny introduced him to Monet. From that moment and for many years onward, Durand-Ruel would be Monet's dealer and loyal supporter, and that for all the other Impressionists as well. Monet returned to France via Holland, whence he brought back some wonderful landscapes. He was particularly beguiled by the little town of Zaandam. In Old Master paintings the famous canals of Holland are as calm as a mirror. In Monet's landscapes the waters reflecting well-kept houses and windmills toss and quiver, causing numerous patches of light to shimmer with bright colour. In Holland, Monet had found a milieu with water at its centre, and this was indispensable for his painting. When, at the end of 1871, Monet and his family returned to France, they moved to the banks of the Seine, at Argenteuil.

Argenteuil was a charming little town at that time. It had become easy to reach after a rail line was built in the direction of Saint-Germin-en-Laye. There were trains leaving every hour from the Saint-Lazare station that covered the roughly six mile distance in twenty-two minutes. Parisians flocked to Argenteuil for relaxation: it was perfect for boating and arranging picnics on the green hills that overlooked the river. The town was located where the river widened, and its meandering course was particularly lovely. From 1867 on, Argenteuil had become a centre for international sailing regattas, creating a wonderful, continuously festive atmosphere. But there was little sense of celebration in the poet's life. They had quickly gone through Camille's resources. Monet's letters to his friends, to Edouard Manet, and to Durand-Ruel were full of appeals for help.

In 1871-1872 Monet's landscapes were not yet characterised by great richness of colour. Rather, they recalled the tonalities of paintings by the Barbizon artists, and Boudin's seascapes. He composed a range of colour based on yellow-brown or blue-grey. The rippling of the water and its reflections, such as one finds in his views of Grenouillère, seemed to belong to the past. But this was only a phase in which Monet, in his own way, regathered his momentum after a long interruption due to the war. As he refamiliarised himself with the river, Monet discovered the miracles of colour, and his eye captured its nuances more and more closely. Following Daubigny's example, Monet built a floating studio for himself. Since Monet often painted out in the middle of the river, the viewer is situated inside the landscape in these paintings. The concrete of one railroad bridge and the ironwork of another introduced an element of modern life into this rural idyll. Monet depicted these bridges many a time from different angles. At times he also painted the train: its amusing little carriages blend in nicely with the landscape. He painted the Seine at Argenteuil using broken brushstrokes of colour, either pure or mixed with white, rapidly applying paint to canvas and completing the painting entirely in the open air. *Regattas at Argenteuil* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), a not-very-large canvas with a dazzling blue sky, a red roof and white sails, became a veritable celebration of colour. The painter applied his colours in thick strokes with a brush or a palette knife, giving the impression of reflections gradually fading on the water's surface. It was already there – that truly open-air painting that would be designated "Impressionism" the following year. At the same time Monet was attentively studying tree foliage, discovering an infinite quantity of gradations in nuance that his predecessors had never suspected existed. The little garden beside his house was the only motif he needed. Monet painted this garden from different angles, each time discovering something lovely and new there. Camille and their son Jean were his constant subjects, seated beneath the trees or walking along the country paths. But even when his wife or his son or one of his friends appeared in the painting, the painter

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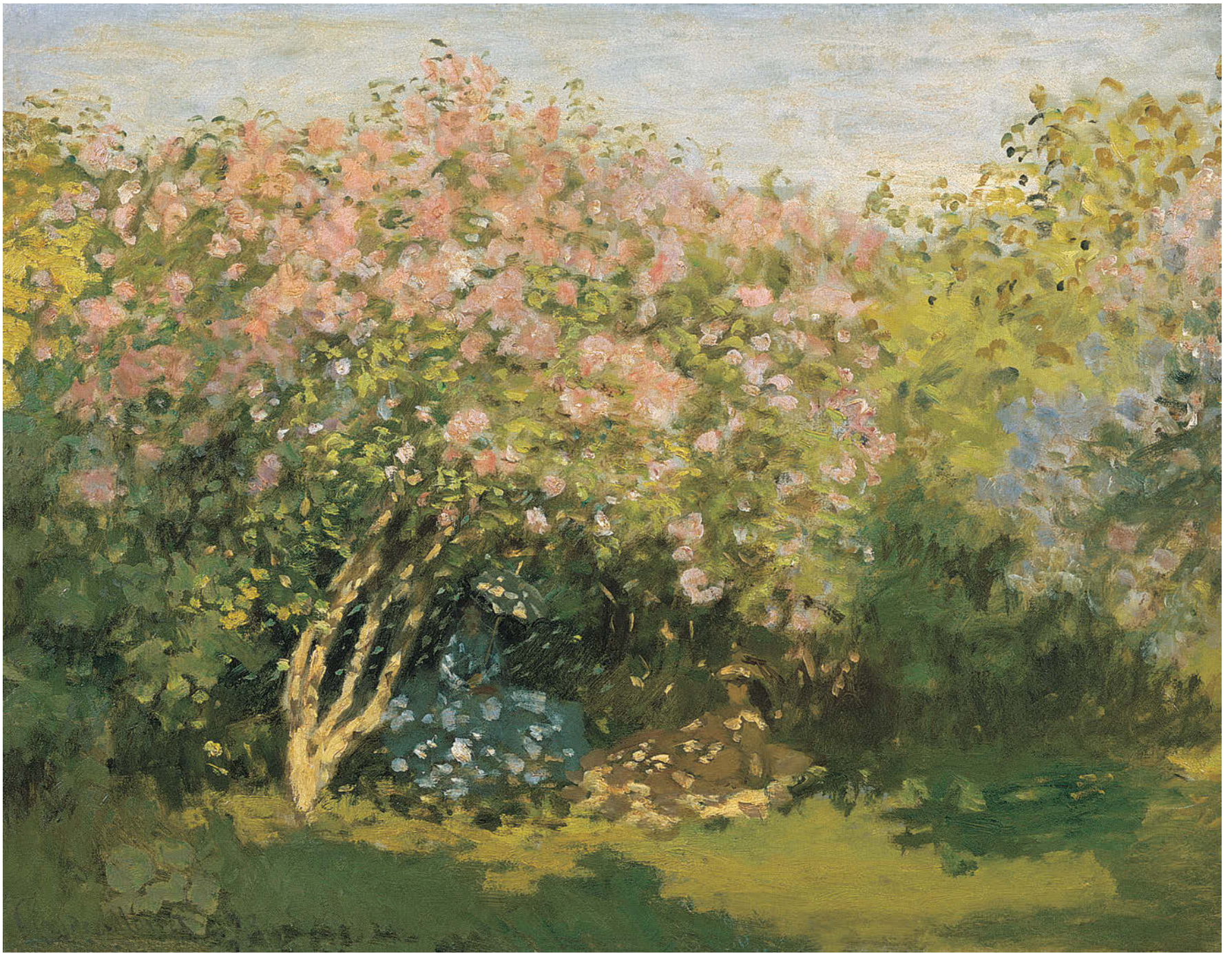

was more interested in the atmospheric haze, or patches of sunlight on light-coloured dresses. One day when Monet was painting Camille and a friend, he went so far as to dig a trench in the garden, where he set up his canvas. He needed a point of view from below that would allow him to take the surrounding greenery into his field of vision. The flowering beds of lilacs became Monet's favourite motif in the garden (*Lilacs in the Sun,* p. 103). The warm yellow-green tone of the grass in the sun is in contrast to the cool, grey-green tone of the shadow. The pale, purple-pink flowers become a source of light. Sunlight playing over the foliage throws a pink tint over Camille's dress, which is hidden in the shadows. But most of all there is that hazy heat that no one, before Monet, had ever tried to render in a painting. It effaces all the edges, saps everything of its sharpness and definition, and produces that very "impression" which would later give this art form its name. Argenteuil played a special role in Monet's life. He painted hundreds of landscapes there that virtually paved the way for the impact his paintings would have at the time of the first exhibition in 1874. With the exhibition of the *Société Anonyme* in mind, Monet painted a great many

Claude Monet,
Lilacs in the Sun, 1873.
Oil on canvas, 50 x 65 cm.
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

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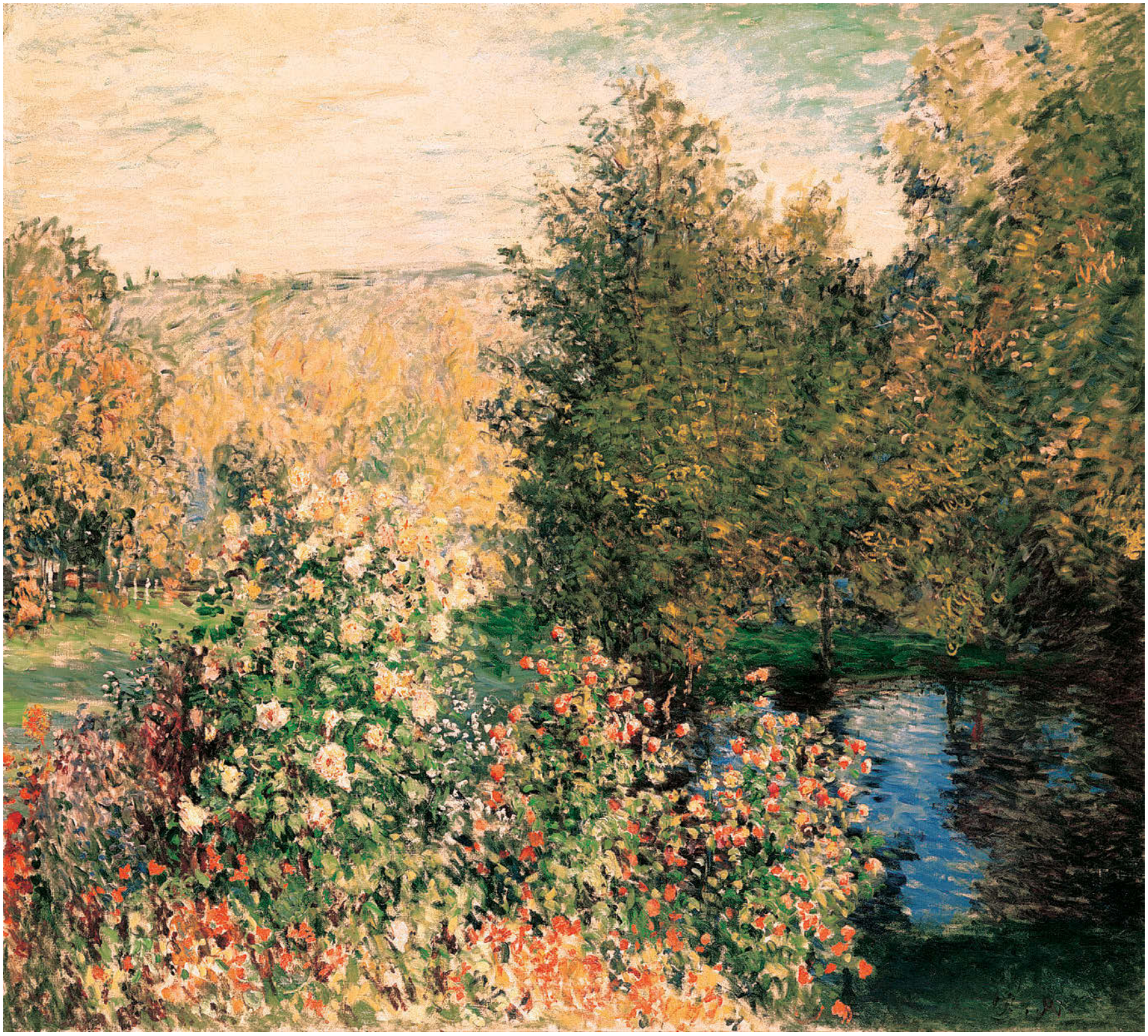

Claude Monet,
Corner of the Garden at Montgeron,
c. 1876.
Oil on canvas, 175 x 194 cm.
The State Hermitage Museum,
St Petersburg.

landscapes in Normandy, along the Seine. In January 1874 he travelled to his cherished village of Le Havre and moved into the *Hotel de l'Amirauté,* near the port. From his window he could see the port's ceaseless activity, the waiting-lines at the ticket windows, the cases being piled high, and the boats departing. One of the landscapes he painted at that time was a view of the port of Le Havre, composed after the Japanese system of perspective. The image fills the entire canvas just to the upper edge (*The Grand Dock at Le Havre*, St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum). Claude Monet shared the general infatuation of that period with the Japanese masters, and was among the first to familiarise himself with their pictorial art. But in choosing the works for the exhibition Monet favoured the view from the hotel window, where the port

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could not be seen, and where the essential element was the veil of morning mist. This landscape, called *Impression, soleil levant* (Paris, Musée Marmottan) would decide the fate of the exhibition's participants. They became "Impressionists", and Claude Monet was unanimously designated head of the group.

Another painting of Claude Monet's was the revelation of the 1874 exhibit. It was his first urban landscape *The Boulevard des Capucines* (p. 109), painted in 1873. It also had a prophetic character; it was there that, one year later, the famous exhibition would open. Two Parisians in top hats are looking out the second-floor window of Nadar's studio. There is practically no sky in this landscape: the new buildings and hotels rise to the upper limit of the canvas. Their shadow divides the space into night and day. The side lit by the sun is

Claude Monet,
Pond at Montgeron, 1876-1877.
Oil on canvas, 173 x 194 cm.
The State Hermitage Museum,
St Petersburg.

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flooded with light, and the bare branches of the trees are nearly dissolved in it. They create that golden mist, through which only vague, elusive shapes can be seen. In the deep blue shadow the human figures appear more distinctly, though even here they are part of a single moving mass. One can feel the rhythm of modern life in this landscape of Monet's. It is Haussmann's Paris, and for the first time it has become the subject of a painting. In it, despite the sceptical attitude of Monet's contemporaries towards the new architecture, the painter has discovered a specific beauty.

During the summer of 1874 after the exhibition, Edouard Manet frequently visited Monet in Argenteuil. He carefully observed his painting process and painted Monet with Camille on their floating studio. A wonderful souvenir of that summer has been preserved: the same corner of the garden painted by Monet, Renoir, and Manet. Edouard Manet arrived as Monet was watering his flowers, and Camille was sitting in the shadow of a tree with her son. He asked for a canvas and painted the idyllic scene. The head of the household could not resist – he painted Manet as he worked. Sadly, his study has not survived. At that moment Renoir arrived, and began to paint the same thing. "I arrived at Claude Monet's just as Manet was getting ready to do the same subject," recounted Renoir, "and just think if I had let such a fine opportunity go to waste, with models ready and waiting" (Ambroise Vollard, *Renoir*, Paris, 1920, p. 74). According to Claude Monet's version of this episode: "This delectable painting of Renoir's, which I am so happy to own now, is a portrait of my first wife. It was painted in our garden at Argenteuil one day when Manet, beguiled by the colour and the light, had undertaken to make a painting in the open air with figures beneath the trees. During the session Renoir arrived. He was also carried away by the charm of the moment. He asked me for a palette, a brush, and a canvas – and there he was, painting at Manet's side. Manet watched him out of the corner of his eye and, from time to time, would go over to his canvas. Then he would half-grimace, sidle over to me discreetly, and whisper in my ear as he gestured towards Renoir: 'He's got no talent at all, that boy. You're his friend, so tell him to give up painting !' Pretty funny on Manet's part, eh?" (M. Elder, *A Giverny, chez Claude Monet [With Claude Monet at Giverny]*, Paris, 1924, p. 70).

At difficult moments in their lives Monet and the other Impressionists were assisted by their friends. They did not have many, but these provided both material support by buying their paintings and, more importantly, the warmth of their friendship. Among them were the amateur painter Gustave Caillebotte, who had exhibited along with the Impressionists and who enjoyed a considerable fortune. He collected a large number of their paintings. As early as 1876 he had prepared a will bequeathing his collection to France. When he died twenty years later the committee of French painters refused the gift. Upon review of the matter only a portion of the gift was accepted by France. The baritone of the Paris Opera, Jean-Baptiste Faure, bought paintings by Edouard Manet and some Impressionists, including many paintings by Monet. The Parisian civil servant Victor Chocquet bought paintings by the Impressionists as soon as he had sufficient funds. Dr. Gachet owned some works by Monet and his friends, whom he treated as the need arose. The financier and editor of the art review *L'Art de la Mode (Art Now)*, Ernest Hoschédé, bought paintings and invited the painters to his estate. In July 1876 Edouard Manet spent two weeks at Hoschédé's home in Montgeron, south of Paris. This was where the Château Rottembourg, which the financier's wife Alice Raingo had inherited from her husband, was located. After Manet it was Monet's turn to be invited to Montgeron that same summer. Hoschédé commissioned some decorative panels by Monet for the main receiving room at Montgeron. He put a large studio not far from the château at Monet's

Claude Monet,
Rue Saint Denis, National Holiday, 30 June, 1878, 1878.
Oil on canvas, 76 x 52 cm.
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen.

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disposal, along with a little fisherman's cabin on the banks of the Yerres River, where he also painted. Monet could work peacefully there, free from everyday concerns. The amateur painter in the family was Alice. She and her husband had at first collected the works of painters of the Barbizon School, and later those of the Impressionists. Monet painted four decorative panels with the park at Montgeron as his subject.

Decorative painting was a new field for Monet. These large, almost square canvases are little more than enlarged Impressionist paintings. Because of their dimensions it was impossible to paint out of doors. Monet worked on them in the studio from studies, yet these panels have all the qualities of open-air painting. One has the impression that the painter has transferred a corner of the garden as he saw it in nature directly onto the canvas, with no concern at all for the composition (*Corner of the Garden at Montgeron*, p. 104). The flowering shrubs are cropped by the lower edge of the canvas, and the bright blue of a part of the pond can be glimpsed. A style of composition that was not classical, but seemed instead to be chosen at random, was one of the methods used by the Impressionists. The roses are painted with juxtaposed brushstrokes of white lead and red which, through an optical phenomenon, give the viewer the impression of fresh flowers suffused with morning dew. The light blue haze of a hot summer's day softens the colours in the background. Monet's painting celebrates the beauty of nature, alive and unaffected. Another of Monet's panels begins with a pond shadowed by trees that takes up two-thirds of the height of the canvas (*Pond at Montgeron*, p. 105). A bank of damp mist conceals the human figures. The eye can barely make out one lady with a fishing rod standing in the shadow of a tree, another reclining in the grass, and two figures walking away. Only in the background do the trees part, leaving the field open to the warm, golden sunlight. Instead of grey-blue in the far distance, Monet paints the background in warm tones, like Edouard Manet in *Luncheon on the Grass*. The painter has overturned all the classical rules of aerial perspective. The water is painted with thick strokes of the palette knife, and is composed of patches of white lead, sky blue, green, and brown. The various reflections in the foreground keep it from assuming the traditional yellowish-brown tint. One could not work according to the old methods if one wanted to capture the effects created in nature by changes of colour. But the Impressionist technique was not entirely adaptable to decorative panels – it made them appear too fragmented. Monet came closest to the concept of decorative painting in the panel entitled *The Turkeys* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay). The large patch of green grass is painted without particular detail, albeit in broken, juxtaposed brushstrokes, and provides an ideal ground for these white turkeys with their red beaks and necks. This panel is the only one in which the Château Rottembourg, in the far background, is represented.

At the third Impressionist exhibition in 1877 Monet presented a series of paintings for the first time: seven views of the Saint-Lazare train station. He selected them from among twelve he had painted at the station. This motif in Monet's work is in line not only with Manet's *The Railway* and with his own landscapes featuring trains and stations at Argenteuil, but also with a trend that surfaced after the railways first began to appear. These made a deep impression on painters and many of them represented the event in their art, starting with the English painter Turner, who painted a locomotive in 1844, and on through to the Lumière brothers, whose first publicly-shown work in 1895 was the film "Train Arriving". Renoir told his son how Monet reacted to the objection to his landscape *Impression, Sunrise* that "you couldn't see a thing." "Monet haughtily shrugged his shoulders. 'Poor blindmen. They want to see every detail in the middle of a mist !' A critic declared to him that mist was not a fit subject for a painting. 'Why don't you just show a fight between two Negroes in a tunnel ?"

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(J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 186). This lack of comprehension outraged Monet. He wanted to paint something even mistier. In fact, it is precisely in fog that one would most likely find nuances of colour invisible to the naked or the untrained eye. He did not intend to paint the Gare Saint-Lazare from memory: he wanted to capture the play of sunlight on the clouds of steam escaping from the locomotives. "They'll have to delay the Rouen train. The light is best a half-hour after it leaves" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 186). The idea seemed mad. No one but Monet would have been capable of carrying it off. It required his daring, his determination, and his self-confidence. What happened next could not be told better than does Renoir himself.

Claude Monet,
Le Boulevard des Capucines, 1873-1874.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 60 cm.
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art,
Kansas City, Missouri.

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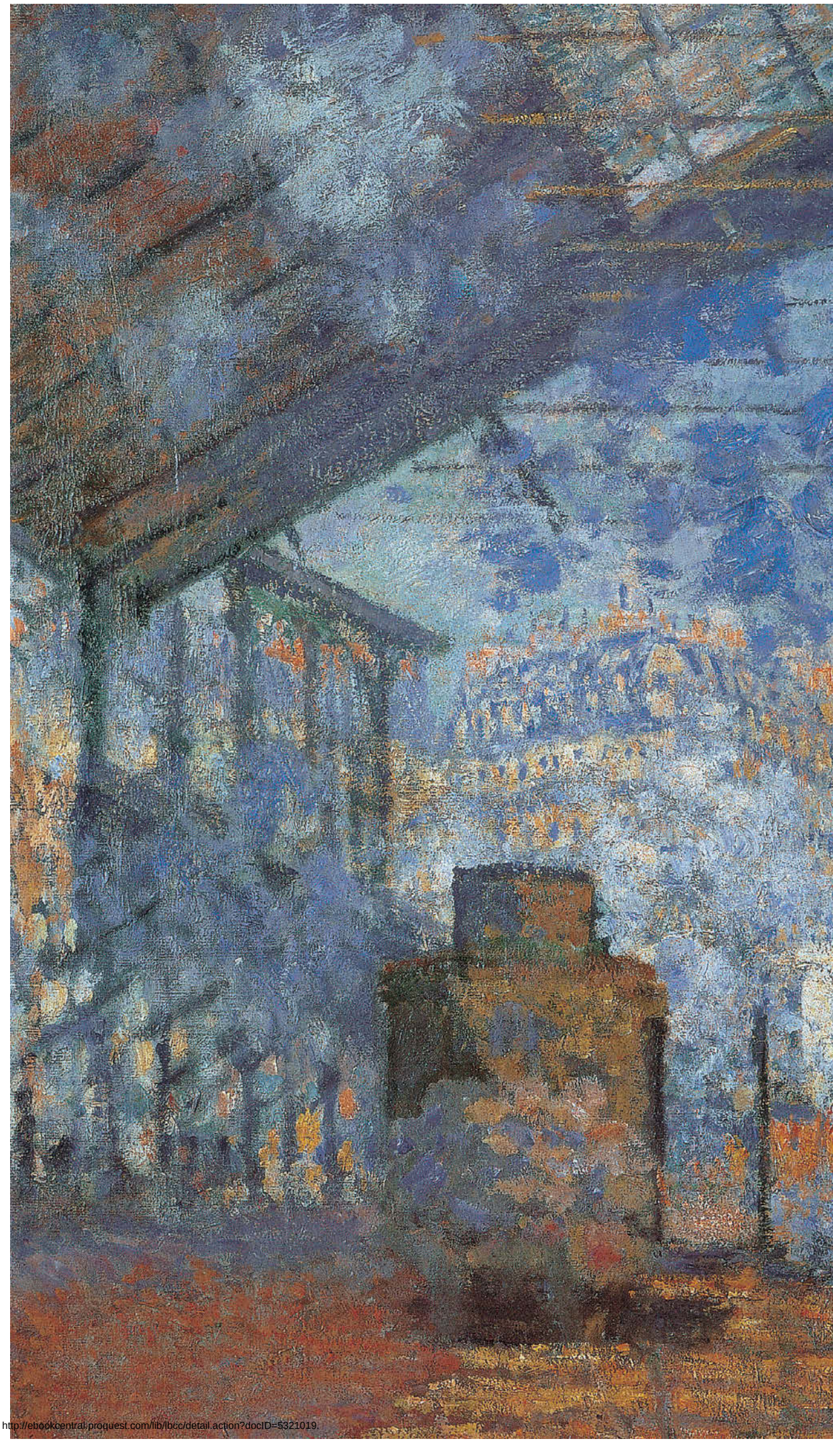

Claude Monet,

Saint-Lazare Station, 1877.

Oil on canvas, 75 x 104 cm.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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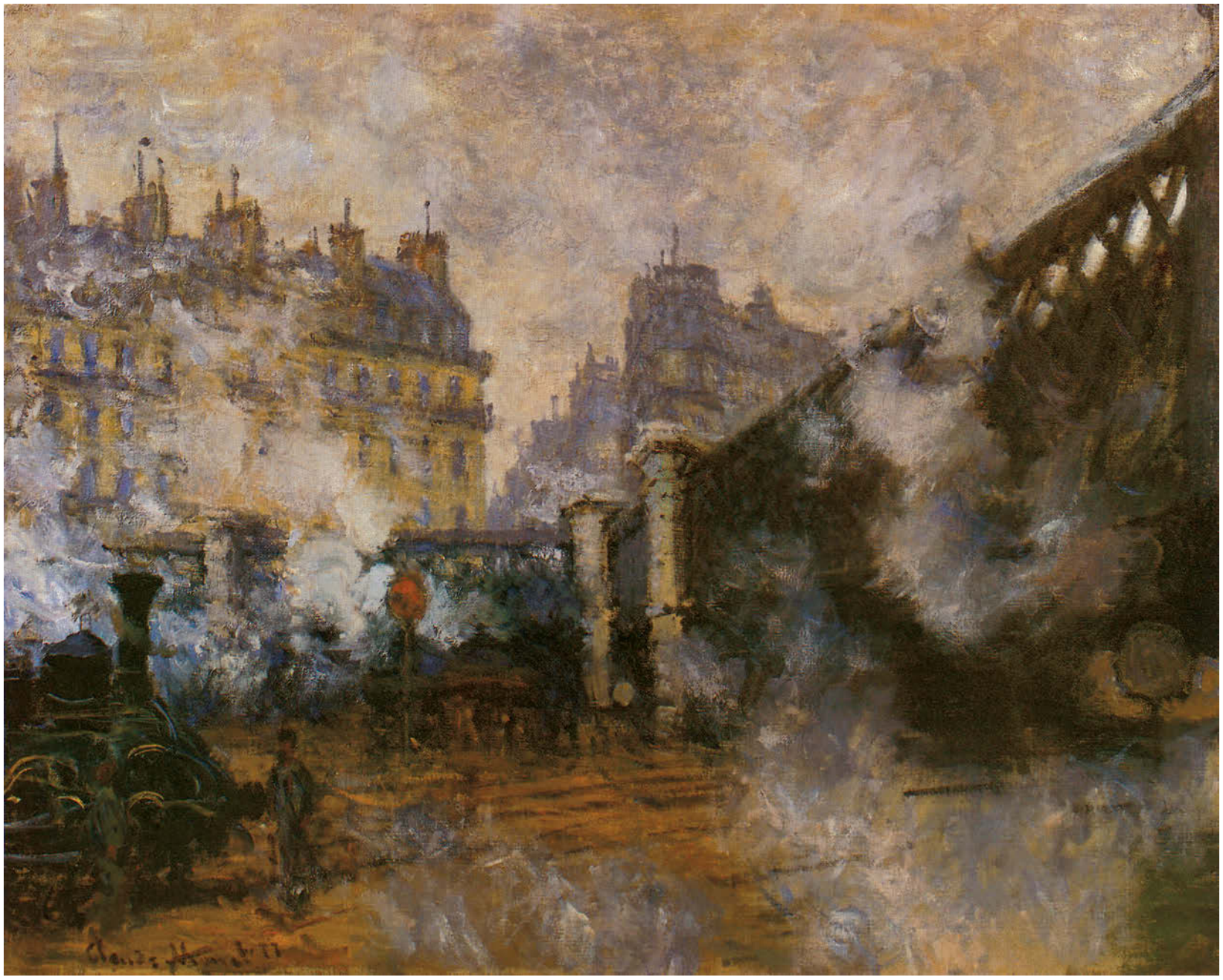

Claude Monet,
The Bridge of Europe, Saint-Lazare Station, 1877.
Oil on canvas, 64 x 81 cm.
Musée Marmottan, Paris.

"He dressed up in his finest outfit, fluffed out his lace cuffs and, casually toying with a gold-knobbed cane, had his card sent up to the director of the Western Railroad at the Gare Saint-Lazare. The doorman, dumbfounded, soon announced him. The high-ranking individual beckoned to him to sit down, and his visitor introduced himself with the greatest simplicity: 'I am Claude Monet, the painter'. This particular director had no knowledge whatever of painting, but didn't dare admit it. Monet allowed him to flounder for a few minutes, then deigned to make the great announcement. 'I have decided to paint your station. I hesitated for some time between the Gare du Nord and your own, but in the end I believe that yours has more character' (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 187). Monet got everything he asked for. They had the trains rolling in front of him – first in one direction then in the other." They stoked the locomotives with coal so that the smoke turned the colour he needed. In the end he succeeded not only in making good use of the motif of Haussmann's new Paris, but also in rendering changes in colour and light in one and the same motif – this was the ideal all the Impressionists aspired to. Monet was the most coherent among them in terms of his ideas. From that moment onward the serial painting would be his favourite procedure.

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The close of the 1870s was the most difficult period in Monet's life. In 1878 the family had to leave Argenteuil. Monet's financial situation continued to worsen despite his friends' assistance. For a short time he moved to Paris, where Camille gave birth to his second son, Michel, but living in Paris was too expensive. On the banks of the Seine, which he was still painting, Monet discovered Vétheuil, a charming town not far from Mantes. The Monet family moved there in 1878, along with Alice Hoschédé and her six children. The youngest of them, Jean-Pierre, was born nearly at the same time as Michel Monet. There has even been speculation that he himself was Monet's son because, after the painter's stay at Montgeron, he and Alice had begun an intimate relationship. The two youngest boys were called "*les petites*", and they appeared frequently in Monet's landscapes. Beside the house there was a garden full of blossoming sunflowers. Sunlight radiates through the garden in Monet's canvases. Although Monet's work didn't include many still life paintings, he could not resist the temptation to paint the cut sunflowers in a vase (*Bouquet of Sunflowers*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Under his brush the yellow flowers were miraculously transformed into sunlight. At Vétheuil Alice helped Monet look after his children and

Claude Monet,
The Railway Bridge at Argenteuil, 1873.
Oil on canvas, 55 x 72 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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care for Camille, who was seriously ill. In 1879 Camille died. Monet painted her on her deathbed, unable to resist the pull of colour even at such a tragic moment in his life.

During all this time the painter worked tirelessly. He painted the shapes of villages with Gothic and Romanesque churches reflected in the waters of the river, islands in the Seine, and poplar trees. He worked in clear weather, in fog, and in the rain with the meticulousness of a scholar studying methods of rendering the atmosphere in painting. "I begged Monet to leave after lunch to go work among the islands," wrote Ernest Hoschédé, "because it's pouring down rain at the moment" (D. Wildenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 32). Hoschédé was coming to Vétheuil more and more rarely. In 1881 he demanded that Alice return, but it was too late. Monet was happy with Alice, and considered her children his own. Even their constant financial difficulties did not cast a pall over their happiness. But because of these difficulties they were forced to move to Poissy, not far from Vétheuil. From a painter's standpoint, this new location held no attraction for Monet.

During this period he painted frequently in Normandy, exploring the beauty of its seaports: Fécamp, Dieppe, Varengeville. He was often absent for several months at a time, and the search for motifs sometimes took him fairly far from home. In December 1883 Monet and Renoir travelled through Provence together, and afterwards went on to Genoa. During this trip they discovered Bordighera, a wonderful location in Italy near the French border. In January 1884 Monet returned there, but this time alone. In a letter to Durand-Ruel he asked him to keep his trip a secret because he didn't want to work alongside Renoir. "I really wanted only to go there by myself, so I could be freer with my impressions. It's always bad to work in pairs," he explained later to Durand-Ruel (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 270). There was always something akin to jealousy between these two friends in their painting relationship. " I'm going to stick to palm trees and somewhat exotic aspects here," he wrote to his dealer. "Apart from that I'll do some water, some beautiful blue water" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 270). Still, this wasn't enough for him. He learned there was a stunning garden at Bordighera. "Do you have any contacts in Marseille ?" he asked Durand-Ruel. "There is an M. Moreno of Marseille who lives on a wonderful estate, but access isn't allowed without references. If you could arrange that for me I'd be happy indeed" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 270). His work resulted in elegant, exotic landscapes with palm trees, overflowing with colour nuances. The Mediterranean light became a fresh object of study for Monet. "This may provoke a bit of an outcry among enemies of blue and pink, for it is indeed so, this magical light I'm interested in rendering, and I'm sure those who haven't seen this country – or who haven't really seen it well – will scream that it is implausibly depicted, although I'm reducing the tone quite a bit. Everything is in iridescent colours of pigeon's throat and brandy flambé, it's wonderful and every day the countryside is more beautiful, and I'm enchanted with this land" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 273). Monet made his second trip through the south of France in 1888. He stopped off at Antibes, which welcomed him with a winter rainstorm. When the weather was back to normal and the painter was able to work, the southern light enchanted him all over again. This time his range of colours, based on the most delicately graded nuances of blue and pink, gave his oil painting the look of pastel. "I'm painting the town of Antibes," he wrote Alice, "a little fortified town, all golden in the sun, standing out against beautiful blue-and-pink mountains and the chain of the Alps forever covered with snow" (*L'Impressionnisme et le Paysage Français [Impressionism and the French Landscape]*, Paris, Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1985, p. 328). Wherever he worked, Monet did not forget his family. "So know once and for all that you are my whole life, along with my children," he wrote Alice from Bordighera,

Claude Monet,
The Artist's Garden at Vétheuil, 1880.
Oil on canvas, 151.5 x 121 cm.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

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"and while I work I never stop thinking of you. This is so true that, with every motif that I do, that I choose, I say to myself I must render it really well, so you can see where I was and what it's like" (D. Wildenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 48). However they were not truly a happy family until after the death of Ernest Hoschédé in 1892. The marriage of Alice and Claude Monet took place at Giverny 16 July 1892.

Ten years earlier, in 1883, Monet had bought a house in the village of Giverny, near the little town of Vernon. The house was located on the right bank of the Seine, where its tributary the Epte rushes into the river, right at the border of Normandy and the Isle de France. Monet remained fond of the Seine all his life. "I've never grown weary of it," he said later. "It's always new for me" (D. Wildenstein, op. ct., p. 44). It followed naturally that his search for a new home would lead them there. "What enchanted Monet," recounted Alice's youngest son, "was the view of the magnificent horizon on which Giverny opens its windows" (Jean-Pierre Hoschédé, *Claude Monet, ce Mal Connu [The Little-Known Claude Monet]*, Genève, 1960, t. 1, p. 20). Monet looked at the world with a painter's eyes, and there were so many motifs for him there. "In between all these bodies of water, great natural grasslands spread out, lushly blooming and ringed with poplar trees," wrote Jean-Pierre Hoschédé. "Slightly elevated, facing south and running lengthwise over several kilometres, the village stretches out at the foot of the hillside overlooking it" (J.-P. Hoschédé, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 20). It was an ordinary village. Monet was lucky and immediately found a large country house where a studio could be set up. Around it stretched a large meadow where it was possible to create a garden. Monet rented this house without hesitation, and bought it soon after. He lived there until the end of his life. One day he received a letter from Stephane Mallarmé, with the address written as follows: "*Monsier Monet, que l'hiver ni / L'été sa vision ne leurre / Habite, en peignant, Giverny/Si auprès de Vernon, dans l'Eure* [Mr Monet, whose vision neither winter or summer can deceive, lives and paints in Giverny, located next to Vernon, in the Evre]" (*L'Impressionnisme et le Paysage Français [Impressionism and the French Landscape]*, *op. cit.*, p. 248).

The peasants did not accept the painter's family right away: the city people seemed odd to them. But they were won over by Monet's passion for work, which they witnessed continually. Every day, no matter what the weather, they saw the painter at his work in the fields. Monet felt at home right from the start. "I'm enraptured," he wrote the critic Duret. "Giverny is a splendid place for me" (*L'Impressionnisme et le Paysage Français*, *[Impressionism and the French Landscape], op. cit.*, p. 248). Wherever he went he never forgot Giverny. "I get into bed," he wrote Alice from Bordighera, "and for a blissful moment, my hands clasped, I think about Giverny and take a peek at my paintings hanging on the wall" (D. Wildenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 46). They moved the floating studio, built in Argenteuil long before, to Giverny. "We used it mostly for diving off the cabin roof," wrote Jean-Pierre Hoschédé, "and Monet was the leader. He was as good a diver as he was a swimmer, and he supervised our group swims, for the sake of caution" (J.-P. Hoschédé, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 78). He delighted in his time with his family. Sometimes they sailed the boat to Rouen, or went mushroom hunting in the forest. Jean-Pierre Hoschédé remembers a tranquil scene on the riverbank, with Monet painting, Alice sewing, and the children given over to the joys of fishing. The children all loved Monet and were devoted to him. Alice's daughter Blanche, who married Claude's older son Jean, stayed with Monet until the end of his life, taking care of the old painter after her mother's death. "Monet had a violent, intense temperament, but he was kindness itself," she recalled. "He loved children. I remember playing prisoners' base with him on the Vétheuil road, at Roche-Guyon, and also playing hide-and-seek on the Isle de Bennecourt. But when he was working he couldn't be disturbed for any reason whatever" (J.-P. Hoschédé, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 159).

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At Giverny, series painting became one of Monet's chief working procedures. Thirty years later he recounted how he had arrived at it. "I was painting some haystacks which had caught my eye and which made a terrific group, just a short distance from here. One day I noticed that my light had changed. I said to my stepdaughter 'Go to the house and get me another canvas, if you don't mind.' She brought it to me, but shortly after, it was different again. Another ! And one more ! And I wouldn't work on any of them unless I had my effect, and that was it" (D. Wildenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 57). The haystacks became a nearly endless series in his work. He painted them at the very beginning of summer, on the green grass, and in winter, with a thin layer of snow covering them. To Monet's sensitive eye there was an infinite diversity of colours in this mass of dry, yellowed grass. In various combinations, his red, brown, green, and even blue brushstrokes depicted the way the colours change according to the distribution of light. Monet was remarkably consistent in his approach to his research. He worked like a scholar stubbornly pursuing the objective he had set for himself. The poplar trees along the Epte River also became the object of his painting researches. At first he was attracted to the rhythmic beauty of these soaring trees. Then came the phase of meticulously studying the modifications in their colour.

Claude Monet,
Haystacks at Giverny, Sunset, 1888-1889.
Oil on canvas, 65 x 92 cm.
Saitama Museum of Modern Art,
Urawa-shi.

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Claude Monet,

Rouen Cathedral, *Setting Sun*, 1892-1894.

Oil on canvas, 100 x 65 cm.

National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.

Claude Monet,

Rouen Cathedral, Evening, 1894.

Oil on canvas, 100 x 65 cm.

The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

At the beginning of the 1890s Monet travelled to Rouen. In 1892 he went there to purchase back some of his own paintings that his half-sister Marie had inherited. Monet took a room facing the famous Gothic cathedral. As he was obliged to stay in Rouen for some time he began to paint the cathedral from his window. He had meant to return to Giverny after several days, but his work absorbed him completely. He painted the cathedral in all weather and at all times of day or night. When lit by the sun at midday the enormous mass of the cathedral dissolved in the hazy heat, its contours became blurred, and the building became lighter and nearly transparent. At night the blue shadows were deeper and denser, and the gothic-filigree stonework of the façade appeared in all its splendour. In reality the motif in Monet's painting wasn't Rouen Cathedral at all, it was the light and air of Normandy. The result was a veritable symphony of colours. Art had never, up to that point, seen anything like it. In the spring of 1895 Monet opened his exhibition, where he showed twenty variations of his *Rouen Cathedral* (pp. 118 and 119). Sadly, the critics' exhortations to the buyers to purchase the series as a whole went unheard, and Monet's "Cathedrals" were scattered throughout the world.

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The meadows of Giverny always remained his favourite motif. In the luxuriantly flowering grass with its poppies exploding in tiny flames, Monet's practiced eye, trained by years of work, could distinguish a vast number of graded nuances. He created an extremely delicate mosaic on the canvas, composed of tiny brushstrokes of colour. Paul Cézanne, who had criticised Monet for copying unthinkingly from nature, said of him one day, "He's nothing but an eye." But, quickly catching himself, he added "But what an eye !" (Camille Mauclair, *Claude Monet*, Paris, 1924, p. 51). These meadows became his permanent workplace. When a journalist, who had come from Vétheuil to interview Monet, asked him where his studio was, the painter answered, "My studio ! I've never had a studio, and I can't see why one would lock oneself up in a room. To draw, yes – to paint, no" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 340). Then, broadly gesturing towards the Seine, the hills, and the silhouette of the little town, he declared, "There's my real studio" (D. Wildenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 38). He painted a field of poppies, and created the impression of wind not only with the rippling shapes of the trees, but also in the way the painting itself was executed. Brushstrokes of pure colour – red, blue, and green – are applied to the canvas with apparent randomness. The tangle of these colours renders the effect of the grass

Claude Monet,
Rouen Cathedral, Portal and Saint-Romain Tower (Full Sunlight), 1893.
Oil on canvas, 107 x 73 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Claude Monet,
Rouen Cathedral at Noon, 1894.
Oil on canvas, 101 x 65 cm.
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

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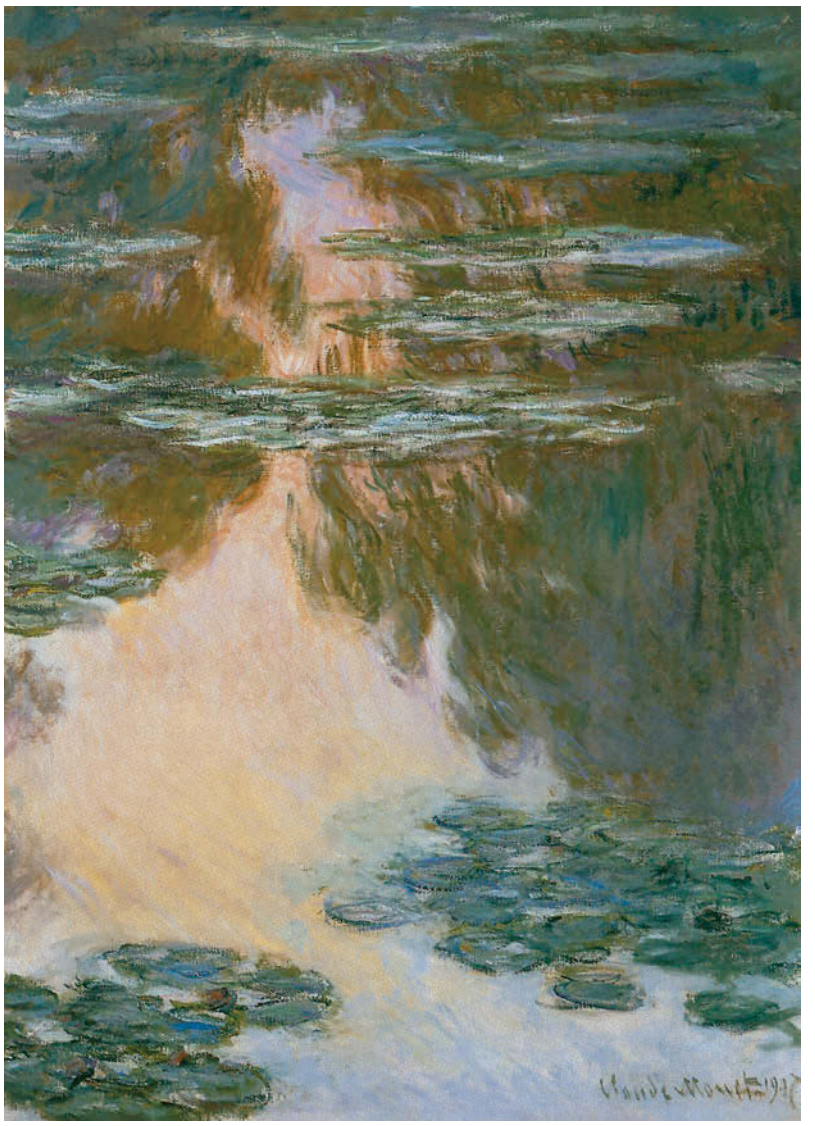
stirring under the wind's breath and, in addition, composes a wonderful tapestry. Each fragment of such a landscape, taken separately, amounts to a complete colour composition in itself. Claude Monet was the first of the nineteenth-century painters to understand the abstract beauty of the canvas' painted surface.

Whenever he left Giverny Monet would most often hurry to the sea. Arriving in Brittany in October 1886, he went to the island of Belle-Isle. "I've set up residence in the little hamlet of Belle-Isle," he wrote his dealer. "I'm working a lot, the location is very lovely but very wild, but the sea is incomparably beautiful, and has amazing rocks. The place is even called 'the wild sea'" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1 p. 318). The Breton landscape resembled no other. "I'm excited by this dark country exactly because it takes me away from what I'm used to doing" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 320). The autumn weather wasn't favourable for his work: "For three days there's been a terrible storm, and I've never seen such a sight" (Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 320). He worked whether it was raining or there was a raging storm, and at times he was forced to cling to the rocks. This extraordinarily hard work brought its rewards: the seascapes painted in Brittany are remarkably expressive. The brushstrokes of white lead, blue, and green create the impression of perpetually agitated water, and of the incessant noise of the Atlantic Ocean, which gives eerie shapes to the shingles tossed up by its tides. The young critic Geoffroy, an acquaintance who would later become a friend, witnessed Monet's heroic open-air work.

But Monet painted most often in Normandy. It had an inexhaustible diversity, and his fondness for it had begun long before. "The area is very lovely and I truly regret that I didn't come to it earlier," he wrote Alice in 1882. "One couldn't be closer to the sea than I am, right on the shingle, in fact, and the waves are beating against the base of the house. (*L'Impressionnisme et le Paysage Français [Impressionism and the French Landscape]*, *op. cit.*, p. 304). He dreamt of showing Alice and the children the cliffs in the region of Caux, the flowering fields overlooking the sea, and the little fishing hamlets tucked into the recesses of the coast. Earlier, in his youth, Boudin had brought him onto the cliffs near Dieppe, where he experienced the revelation of the Normandy landscape's diversity. From the end of the 1860s onward Monet explored the beauty of Etretat. Courbet had previously painted the arch the waters had sculpted into the coastal cliffs. It seemed gigantic when used as a backdrop for the little boats gliding along the shore. But Monet found his own motifs there. What most interested him were the atmospheric phenomena that alter nature's colour. The reflections of the water shifted constantly, and alighted in coloured patches on the cliffs. The cliffs themselves seemed to go into motion, together with the sea and the clouds. In Normandy Blanch Hoschédé, Alice's daughter, made her first attempts at painting. Monet's example inspired his children. One day the writer Guy de Maupassant happened to see Claude Monet at work. This is how, in an unfinished tale, he described the painter on the cliffs of Etretat: "Last year, (…) I often followed Claude Monet searching for impressions. He was no longer a painter, actually, he was a hunter. He would go along, followed by children who carried his canvases – five or six canvases representing the same subject at various times and with different effects. He would take them up and put them aside one



Claude Monet,
The White Water Lilies, 1899.
Oil on canvas, 89 x 93 cm.
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

Claude Monet,
Water Lily Pond, 1907.
Oil on canvas, 100 x 73 cm.
Bridgestone Museum of Art, Tokyo.

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by one, according to the changes in the sky. The painter waited in front of his subject, keeping an eye on the sun and the shadows, then snatching, in a few brushstrokes, a descending ray of sunlight or a passing cloud and, disdainful of the false and the conventional, placing them rapidly on the canvas" (*L'Impressionnisme et le Paysage Français [Impressionism and the French Landscape]*, *op. cit.*, p. 310).

During the winter of 1895 the weather in Europe was unusually cold. The Seine froze all the way to Honfleur. At a banquet in Paris Monet met a Norwegian landscape painter, Fritz Thaulow. When he learned that Monet's stepson was fulfilling his military service in Norway, Thaulow set about convincing Monet to go there precisely in winter. Thus it came about that, at the end of January, Monet left for Christiana. Monet saw the winter there, which would have been strange to a Frenchman, in all its splendour. The ice had blocked access to all the Scandinavian ports, and travellers on the sea routes were halted by numerous snow slides. At first he thought the ice and the wind would make working in the open air impossible. But this Nordic land, with its clear air, was so lovely that Monet went out in the glacial cold. He took a four-day trip by sleigh in the mountains, towards the fjords and over the lakes. In a letter to Geoffroy, the painter wrote that he never saw any water anywhere because everything was frozen. During the day the temperature was always around twenty-five degrees below zero ! He felt wonderful in spite of all this and, most importantly, worked with enthusiasm.

The English serial paintings mark a point in the natural evolution of Monet's way of rendering atmospherics. Monet began to go to London in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and at the beginning of the 1900s he devoted a series of paintings to the Thames River. The painter usually stayed at the Hotel Savoy at Victoria Docks. He either painted from the windows of the hotel, to the left of which stood Waterloo Bridge, or from the windows of St Thomas' Hospital, with a good view of Parliament. The Waterloo bridge series numbered forty-one canvases, and the Parliament series nineteen. Monet was now explicitly making the famous London fog the sole motif of his canvases. The writer Galsworthy described this fog as a compact, colorless mass that engulfed people and automobiles, leaving a grimy aftertaste behind it. For the painter Monet this fog was made up of little patches of pure colour, sky blue, lilac, pink, and gold, and was of an unreal beauty. Perhaps Monet's extraordinary eye did in fact see this multitude of nuances in nature; perhaps his painter's imagination was freely creating this colour harmony on the canvas. He began all the London paintings working directly from nature, but completed many of them afterwards, at Giverny. His individual canvases had no independent existence, in his eyes. The series formed an indivisible whole, and the painter had to work on all his canvases at one time. "I can't send you a single canvas from London," he wrote Durand-Ruel in 1903, "because, for the work I'm doing, it's essential to have them all within sight and, to tell you the truth, not one of them is completely finished. I take them along all together, or at least a certain number, and I don't know how many of them I could exhibit yet, because what I'm doing is rather tricky. One day I'm satisfied, the next day it all looks bad" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 388).

A friend of Monet's, the writer Octave Mirbeau, wrote that he had accomplished a miracle. With the help of colours he had succeeded in recreating on the canvas something almost impossible to capture: he was reproducing sunlight, enriching it with an infinite number of reflections. Alone among the Impressionists, Claude Monet took an almost scientific study of the possibilities of colour to its limits; it is unlikely that one could have gone any farther in that direction.

Claude Monet,
Water Lilies, 1914-1915.
Oil on canvas, 160 x 180 cm.
Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon.

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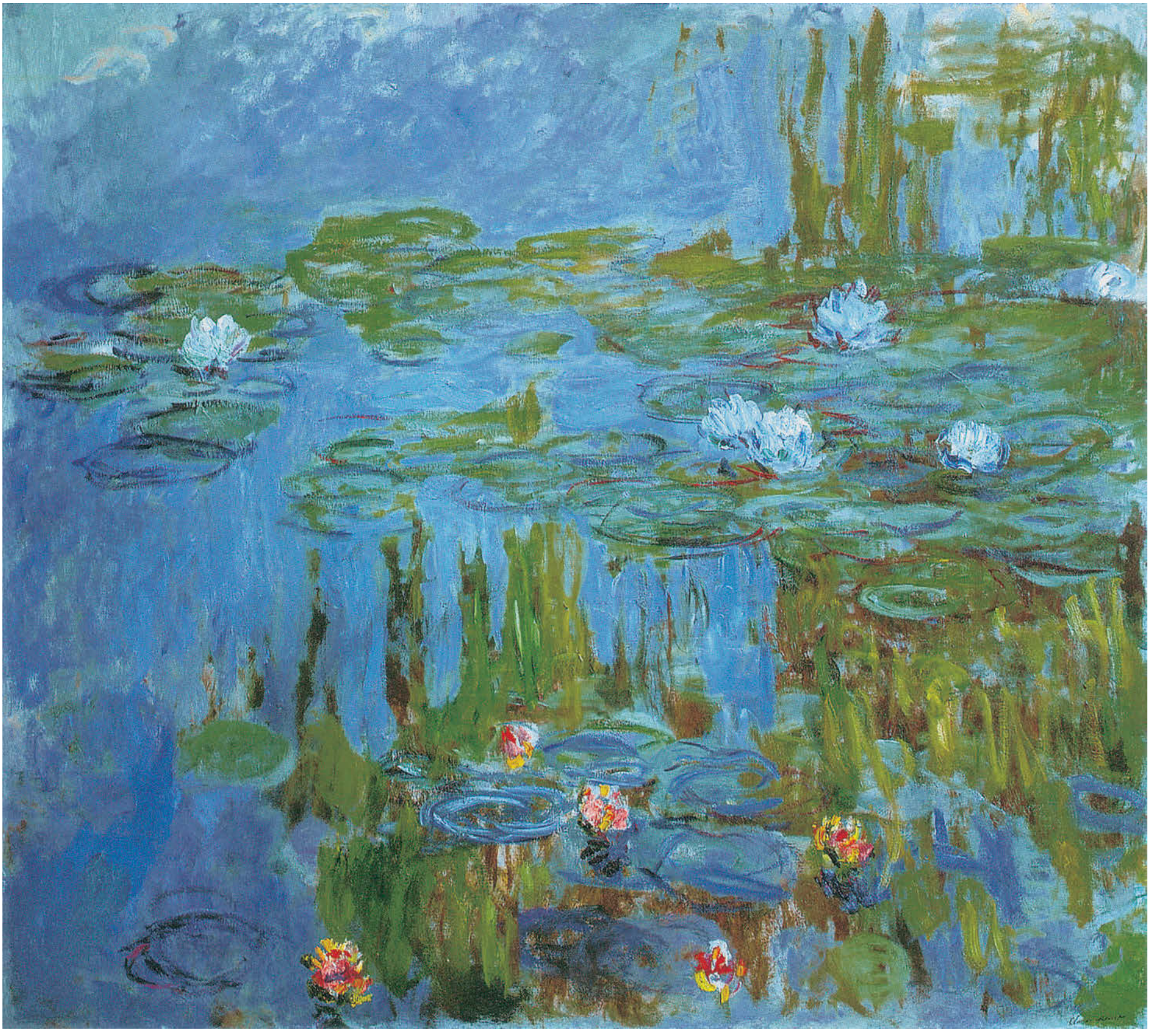

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Claude Monet,
Water Lilies, Water Landscape, Clouds, 1903.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 100 cm.
Private collection.

One of Monet's last trips was one he took with Alice, in 1908, to Venice. To distract themselves from family troubles they accepted an invitation from Alice's friend, Mary Young Hunter. Monet was in a bad mood and did not even want to work, declaring that everything was too beautiful in Venice. Nevertheless in the end, as always, he allowed nature to beguile him. The canvases that he painted in Venice are full of vibrating colours. The sunlight's soft reflections slide over the water of the canals and fade in the humid haze, tracing the shapes of the churches. "I did a few canvases just in case, just to preserve the memory of it, but I very much look forward to staying a whole season next year" (Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 417). But he would never again have the chance to return to Venice.

The 1890s were marked by a new passion in Monet's life. He threw himself into the creation of his garden at Giverny, as he had thrown himself into the creation of serial paintings. Adjacent to his house was a large plot of ground covered with beds of pink, yellow, and purple flowers. There had been a brief period in his life when he painted bouquets of flowers: now he painted the garden born of his own imagination. He argued passionately with Alice in defence of his projects. Finally, despite his wife's objections, he replaced the cypresses with slender metal arches covered in winding, climbing roses. "He adored his garden, which he created entirely himself, because it had only been a simple orchard before," Blanche Hoschédé-Monet

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recounted. “He planted and watered his plants himself. He always loved flowers and surrounded himself with them. Later, with his financial success, he was able to make this wonderful garden and pond, something he had hoped for and dreamt of accomplishing” (J.-P. Hoschédé, *op. cit.*, t. 1, p. 162). Monet himself drew the shape of the pond and the little bridges that crossed it, which afterwards served as motifs for his landscapes. Jean-Pierre Hoschédé wrote this about the gardens: “They were unique as a group because they had been imagined, conceived, and executed not by a gardener, but by an Impressionist who created them as he would have created a painting from nature” (J.-P. Hoschédé, *op. cit.* t. 1, p. 65).

Monet painted an enormous number of landscapes of his own garden. They became a veritable obsession. The motif he loved most were the water lilies. These aquatic flowers first appeared in many Normandy gardens at the turn of the century: they had come into fashion along with the taste for all things Japanese. When Marcel Proust describes one of these aquatic gardens on the Vivonne River, one has the impression he is writing of Claude Monet’s garden. “But farther on the current was slower (…) causing the little ponds that were fed by the Vivonne to be aflower with water lilies. The river banks were thickly wooded here, and the trees’ deep shade usually turned the depths of the water a dark green, though at times, when we were coming home on calm evenings after a stormy afternoon, the bottom of the pond was a clear, crude blue, almost violet, like a Japanese-style partitioned floor. Here and there a water lily floated on the surface, with a scarlet centre and white edges, like a blushing strawberry. Farther on, the flowers were more numerous, paler, less glossy, more seeded, folded more tightly, in groups of randomly disposed spiral patterns…” (Marcel Proust, *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu [A Remembrance of Things Past]*, Moscow, 1970, p. 177). In his garden Monet assembled a multitude of plants of the most varied types. He ordered them by catalogue from various locales, often even from abroad: the water for the pond where the tropical lilies grew had to be artificially heated. The final idea given to him by his garden was a vast panel entitled *Water Lilies* (Paris, Musée de l’Orangerie), composed of fourteen sections. In it Monet at last carried out his conception of monumental painting.

Monet died at Giverny 6 December 1926. He had survived all the other Impressionists, and had seen Matisse and the “Fauves” at the Autumn Salon of 1905. In 1907 he had witnessed the appearance of Picasso’s Cubism. He had lost a son, dead in 1914, had watched the second go off to fight in the First World War, and had read the Surrealist Manifesto published by André Breton. The filmmaker Sacha Guitry has handed an extraordinary document down to us from the beginning of the twentieth century: scenes of famous old men and women of the time. The film preserved the features of Anatole France, Auguste Rodin, and of Renoir, trapped in his invalid’s armchair. As for Claude Monet, Guitry found him in his garden, with his luxuriant beard, wearing a wide-brimmed panama hat. He is in the midst of painting a landscape, and a little dog is running about at his feet. It is common to observe that at the end of his life Monet was no longer an Impressionist. The *Water Lilies* is indeed painted, contrary to his custom, with big brushstrokes, the glittering light has dimmed, the juxtaposed touches of pure colour have disappeared, and the painting has become darker. Certain portions of the panel are painted with such large, indistinct patches of colour that the images of the trees and flowers disappear. The painting becomes almost abstract. But in front of The *Water Lilies* one loses all sense of canvas and of colours. Monet’s The *Water Lilies* surrounds the viewer with the pond’s stagnant water, with the waxy cup-shapes of his flowers, and the weeping willows bent over them. The impression of sensing nature’s breath all around one is so intense that only an Impressionist could have produced it.

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Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841-1919)

"An artist, under pain of oblivion, must have confidence in himself, and listen only to his real master: Nature"

(Pierre Auguste Renoir)

Pierre Auguste Renoir was born in Limoges on 25 February 1841. He was the sixth child in the family of Léonard Renoir and Marguerite Merlet. Three years later, in 1844, the Renoirs moved to Paris. In 1848 Auguste began attending a school run by the Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes. Renoir excelled in musical theory and was soon accepted into the choir at the Church Saint-Eustache, directed by the composer Charles Gounod. In the evenings Gounod taught the most promising pupils, Auguste among them, solo singing and composition. The boy had a good voice and Gounod predicted success for him in the musical field. Fate, however, decided otherwise. In 1854, the boy's parents took him from school and found a place for him in the Lévy brothers' workshop, where he was to learn to paint porcelain. Renoir's younger brother Edmond had this to say: "From what he drew in charcoal on the walls, they concluded that he had the ability for an artist's profession. That was how our parents came to put him to learn the trade of porcelain painter. He was lucky, which isn't always the case. The young apprentice set about mastering the craft seriously: at the end of the day, he armed himself with a piece of cardboard bigger than himself and headed for the free drawing courses. It went on like that for two or three years. He made rapid progress: a few months into his apprenticeship, he was already being set to paint pieces that they usually gave to qualified workers. That made him the butt of jokes. They called him Monsieur Rubens and he cried because they were laughing at him" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 335).

One of the Lévys' workers, Emile Laporte, painted in oils in his spare time. He suggested Renoir make use of his canvases and paints. This offer resulted in the appearance of the first painting by the future Impressionist. It was solemnly presented for Laporte's inspection at the Renoir's home. Edmond Renoir recollected: "It's as if it happened yesterday. I was still a boy, but I understood perfectly that something serious was taking place: the easel with the celebrated painting on it was set up in the middle of the largest room in our modest dwelling on the Rue d'Argenteuil. Everyone was nervous and burning with impatience. I was dressed up nicely and told to behave myself. It was very grand. The 'maître' arrived… At a signal, I moved his chair up close to the easel. He sat down and set about examining the 'work'. I can see it now – it was Eve. Behind her, the snake was twined around the branches of an oak. It was approaching with open jaws, as if it wanted to cast a spell over Eve. The trial lasted a quarter of an hour at least, after which, without any superfluous comments, that poor old man came up to our parents and told them: 'You should let your son go in for painting. In our trade the most he will achieve is to make twelve or fifteen francs a day. I predict a brilliant future for him in art. Do all you can for him'" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 335).

That is how family legend recorded the birth of Renoir the artist. It was no easy matter to dare to give up a good trade and embark on the adventure of *la grande peinture*. "I was making a good living with porcelain," he told Jean. "I helped my parents to buy the house in Louveciennes. I could even live

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Self-Portrait, 1875.
Oil on canvas, 36.1 x 31.7 cm.
Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts.

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independently. That's not at all bad for a fifteen-year-old!" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 335). Nonetheless, showing faith in their son, Auguste's parents heeded Laporte's advice. His mother only suggested saving some money first, so that it would be possible to get by for a year at least, as they could not reckon on their son bringing anything in. The future artist's parents knew how hard it was to make money – Léonard Renoir's work as a tailor barely enabled him to keep his seven children – and could imagine that there was very little likelihood of making much in high art. But that could not be helped… Pierre Auguste Renoir positively acknowledged the role his family had played in shaping his future. It was from his parents that he obtained the respect for the crafts which remained with him all his life. Renoir liked the fact that his father and mother were simple people: "… when I think that I might have been born to intellectuals! I would have needed years to divest myself of all their ideas and to see things as they really are, and in that event I would not have had enough dexterity in my hands." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 18). In some ways he became the same kind of person as them. After all, as he himself put it, "an apple can't ripen on a plum tree." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 18).

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
The Umbrellas, 1881-1885.
Oil on canvas, 180.3 x 114.9 cm.
The National Gallery, London.

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Two Girls in Black, 1881.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 65 cm.
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

Besides the family, however, there was one other major educator in Renoir's life – Paris. In his conversations with Jean, the artist constantly recollected those little corners of the capital where he had spent his childhood and youth, many of which had disappeared before his eyes. One might see the hand of fate in the fact that after moving from Limoges, Léonard Renoir installed his family near the Louvre. The houses constructed in the sixteenth century between the Louvre palace and the Tuileries for noble members of the royal guard had by the middle of the nineteenth century lost their former imposing appearance. Only remnants of the old decoration – coats-of-arms, capitals, empty niches that once held statues – served as reminders of the past. Now occupied by lower class Parisians, this little district had a special atmosphere about it, oddly combining the everyday and the elevated. The Renoirs lived on the Rue d'Argenteuil, which ran through the whole area down to the Seine. Here, in the courtyard of the Louvre, the little Renoir played with other boys. On occasion Queen Marie-Amélie put her head out of the window and threw down some sweets to quieten the noisy children. It was entirely natural to go inside the palace which had become a museum at the time of the French Revolution. "When I was a boy, I often went into the galleries of ancient sculpture, without even knowing precisely why. Perhaps because I passed through the courtyards of the Louvre every day, because it was easy to get into those halls, and because there was never anyone there. I stayed there for hours, lost in day-dreams," Renoir told the artist Albert André (Albert André, *Renoir*, Paris, 1919, p. 33). The young Renoir's wanderings covered a far wider area than the Louvre district, though. "I felt at home on the streets of Paris," he told Jean. "There weren't any cars yet, and you could stroll quietly along them." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 31).

On the same right bank of the Seine as his home, a little upriver, there stood the Fontaine des Innocents, erected on the Rue Saint-Denis as part of the temporary decoration for Henry II's grand entry into Paris in 1549. Renoir related that once he decided to stop by the fountain, thinking that its bas-reliefs might provide fine motifs for porcelain. Some of the reliefs depicting nymphs (the whole piece had earlier been known as

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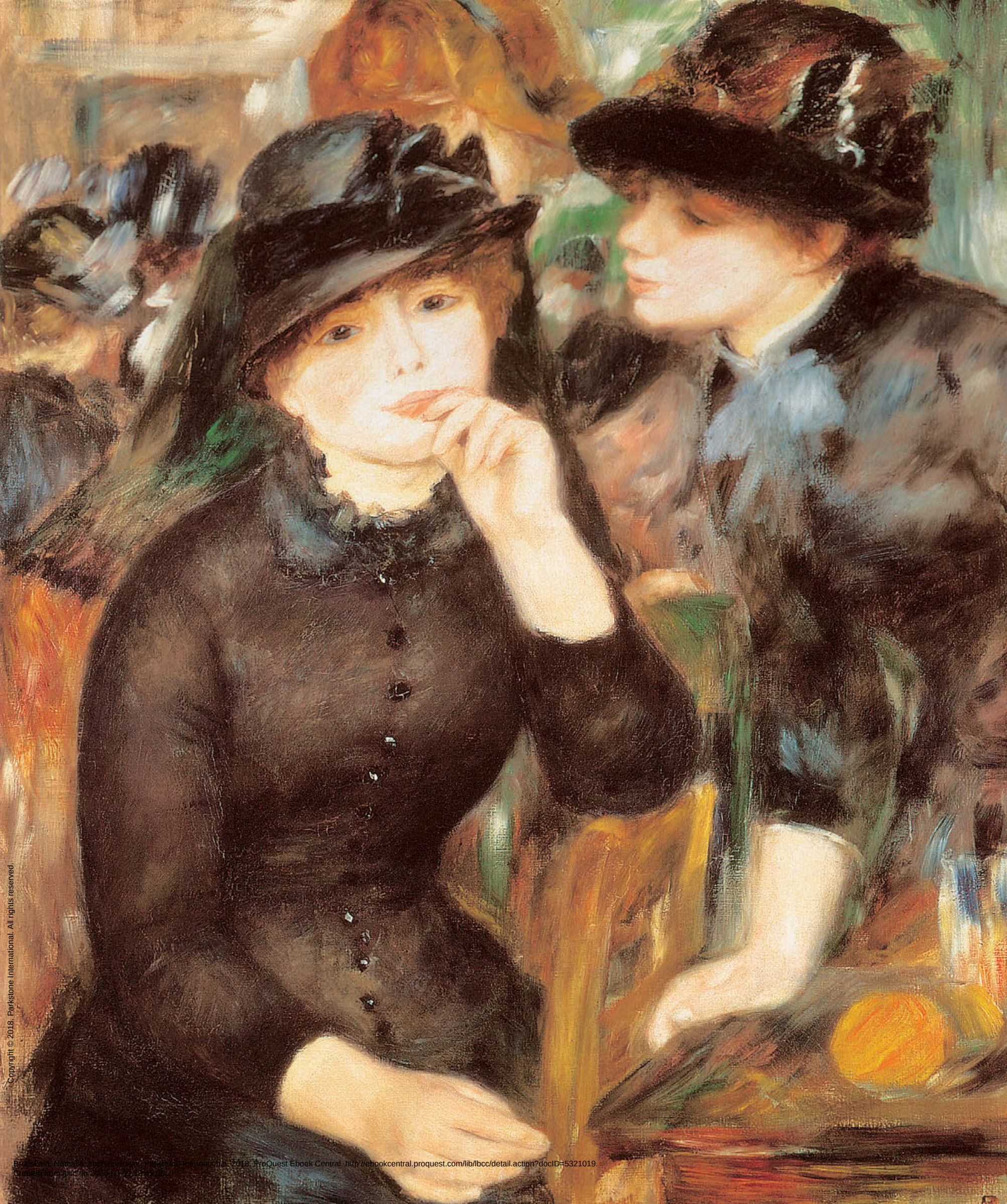

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the Fontaine des Nymphes) were the work of the remarkable sixteenth-century sculptor Jean Goujon, who collaborated with the architect Pierre Lescot on the Louvre. Renoir had an innate sense for real art, his eye unerringly distinguished a masterpiece from a mediocrity. Goujon's creations captivated him at first sight. "Why could I admire the first sculptures [those by Goujon] for hours, while I so quickly tired of the rest?" he mused when recollecting. The Fontaine des Innocents was on the young Renoir's route to the Church of Saint Eustache. Choir practice began very early in the morning, giving Renoir the chance to see the church during morning mass alight with candles in all its mysterious beauty. The architect Viollet-le-Duc said that it was easier to imagine Saint-Eustache as a fairy palace, rather than a Catholic church. Begun by Francis I in 1532, on the site of a thirteenth-century Gothic church, Saint-Eustache was intended to rival Notre-Dame. It is not surprising that the boy was impressed by its tremendous dimensions and enchanted by its mixture of styles. A sense of the fullness of life in all its variety and insubservience to any kind of rules seized the visitor when he left Saint-Eustache and plunged into the atmosphere of the surrounding market. The market had been there since the twelfth century. In 1377 King Louis VI founded it outside the city walls, while under Louis Philippe it had been included into the municipality. Les Halles became an inseparable part of Paris. The air of the city was laced with its smells. "The young Renoir breathed in Paris with all his lungs, with every pore of his skin; he soaked it up," Jean Renoir wrote. "The air was full of the smells of the city, the aromas of the market, the powerful smell of onion mixed with the modest, but pervasive smell of lilac. All this was wafted about by that slightly acrid breeze which is in fact the air of Paris." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 49). Here, outside the doors of the church, was the bustle of that world which became Renoir's own from childhood, where he later drew inspiration and found the models for his painting. "The girls of Les Halles market were part of the landscape," the old Renoir recollected, "The bright silk dresses fitted in very well with the sides of meat and piles of enormous pumpkins. You could have transferred them to a salon in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The main thing was to respect the correlation. And then – in the ruins of Les Halles market I had a good time, whereas the Faubourg Saint-Germain would probably have bored me."(J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 102).

An organic, almost physical sense of himself as part of the city was even then, in childhood, shaping the future artist's work. He saw beauty in the narrow, almost mediaeval streets of old Paris, in the heterogeneity of the elements of Gothic architecture, in the never-corseted figures of the female market traders. And he suffered from the fact that the old Paris, his Paris, was being destroyed. Ironically, it was the period of Renoir's childhood and youth that saw the greatest burst of reconstruction and modernisation in the history of the city. In 1851, for example, a start was made on the new steel-framed market designed by the architect Baltard to replace the disparate pavilions of the old Halles. The ten-year-old saw it with his own eyes. In those same 1850s and 1860s, the map of the city was redrawn in accordance with the grand plan of the prefect of Paris, Baron Haussmann. Daumier drew Parisians who, although strolling along the Champs-Elysées, were under constant threat of being crushed by some heavy girder or buried in one of the pits gaping beneath their feet. When the Renoirs were still living in the Louvre, Auguste sometimes went hunting with one of the neighbours to fields lying near the village of Les Batignolles. Now the Gare Saint-Lazare sprang up in their place and the pure country air was replaced by the soot of locomotives. Renoir was horrified by the broad boulevards and the building of the Grand Palais constructed for the 1900 World Fair. He regretted that a German shell had not destroyed the architect Charles Garnier's Grand Opéra and grieved that the restorer

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
At the Inn of Mother Anthony, 1866.
Oil on canvas.
Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
A Waitress at Duval's Restaurant, 1874.
Oil on canvas, 101 x 71 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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Viollet-le-Duc had cleared Notre-Dame of the various outbuildings that had surrounded it for centuries. He believed that Viollet-le-Duc had inflicted greater damage on the architecture of Paris than the German bombardments and all the preceding wars and revolutions. Eventually, in 1854, the threatened destruction of the old houses inside the Louvre became a reality and the family chose to move to another old district of Paris – the Marais, which from that moment on also formed part of Renoir's world.

In 1858, Pierre Auguste Renoir turned seventeen years old and he left the Lévys' workshop. Mechanical methods of reproducing a design on porcelain were being introduced in the larger firms and the Lévys had been driven out of business. Now, however, Auguste associated the idea of work only with the opportunity to paint. Decorating fans was a good job: he could depict fêtes galantes in the spirit of his beloved Watteau, Boucher and Fragonard. Quite by chance, though, somewhere by Les Halles, Renoir heard it said that an artist was needed to paint the walls of a café. He managed to obtain the job, in a café on the Rue Dauphine, although his slight build and youth aroused mistrust at first. The whole of the owner's family watched fascinated as the artist put on what was almost a circus act: he scurried up the scaffolding as fast as a squirrel one moment, only to come slithering back down the next. Later, Renoir told Jean that it was difficult to paint when you have no chance to step back a distance to look at what you have done. This commission did, however, allow Renoir to taste the joys of working on the large surface of a wall and, probably, infected him for life with that craving for monumental painting which he never did manage to satisfy. Admittedly, in this same period he was invited by the architect building the Folies-Bergère to paint the dining-hall of the restaurant, but turned down the idea on account of numerous technical and practical difficulties.

For a time, probably in 1859, Renoir worked for a Monsieur Gilbert on the Rue du Bac painting screens which served as portable religious images for missionaries. At this time he bought all he needed to work professionally in oils and painted his first portraits. The archives of the Louvre contain a permit issued to Pierre Auguste Renoir in 1861 to copy paintings in the museum. Finally, in 1862 Renoir passed the examinations and entered the Ecole des beaux-arts and, simultaneously, one of the independent studios, where instruction was given by Charles Gleyre, a professor at the Ecole des beaux-arts. This event opened a new chapter in the artist's life. Gleyre's studio was situated on the Left Bank and Renoir took lodgings close by, making one more corner of Paris his. But there was no better draughtsman at the Ecole des beaux-arts at that time, quite possibly no one more skilled at composition either. Although the critics later berated the Impressionists, Renoir included, for their supposed inability to draw (and although they themselves relegated academic learning to a back place in their practice of painting), the attentive eye will always note in the works of Renoir and his fellow-pupils a splendid mastery of the basics of drawing, moulding shapes and composition, because they had in their time exerted every effort to acquire those skills. The second, perhaps even the first, great event of this period in Renoir's life was his meeting, in Gleyre's studio, with those who were to become his best friends for the rest of his days and share his ideas about art. In the studio Renoir immediately noticed a tall youth "with the elegance of people who let their servant put some wear on a new pair of boots for them."» (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 115). "Because of your way of drawing," Bazille replied. "I think you are somebody." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 115). The appearance of Claude Monet in Gleyre's studio could not go unnoticed. This young man from Normandy looked like an aristocrat despite the fact that he rarely had even a sou in his pocket. He shocked his fellow-pupils, contemptuously calling them *épiciers* (grocers). Boldness, self-assurance, a free way of talking to people and the free manner of his painting made Claude Monet the unquestioned leader of the group of

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
A Girl with a Fan, c. 1879-1880.
Oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm.
Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute,
Williamstown, Massachusetts.

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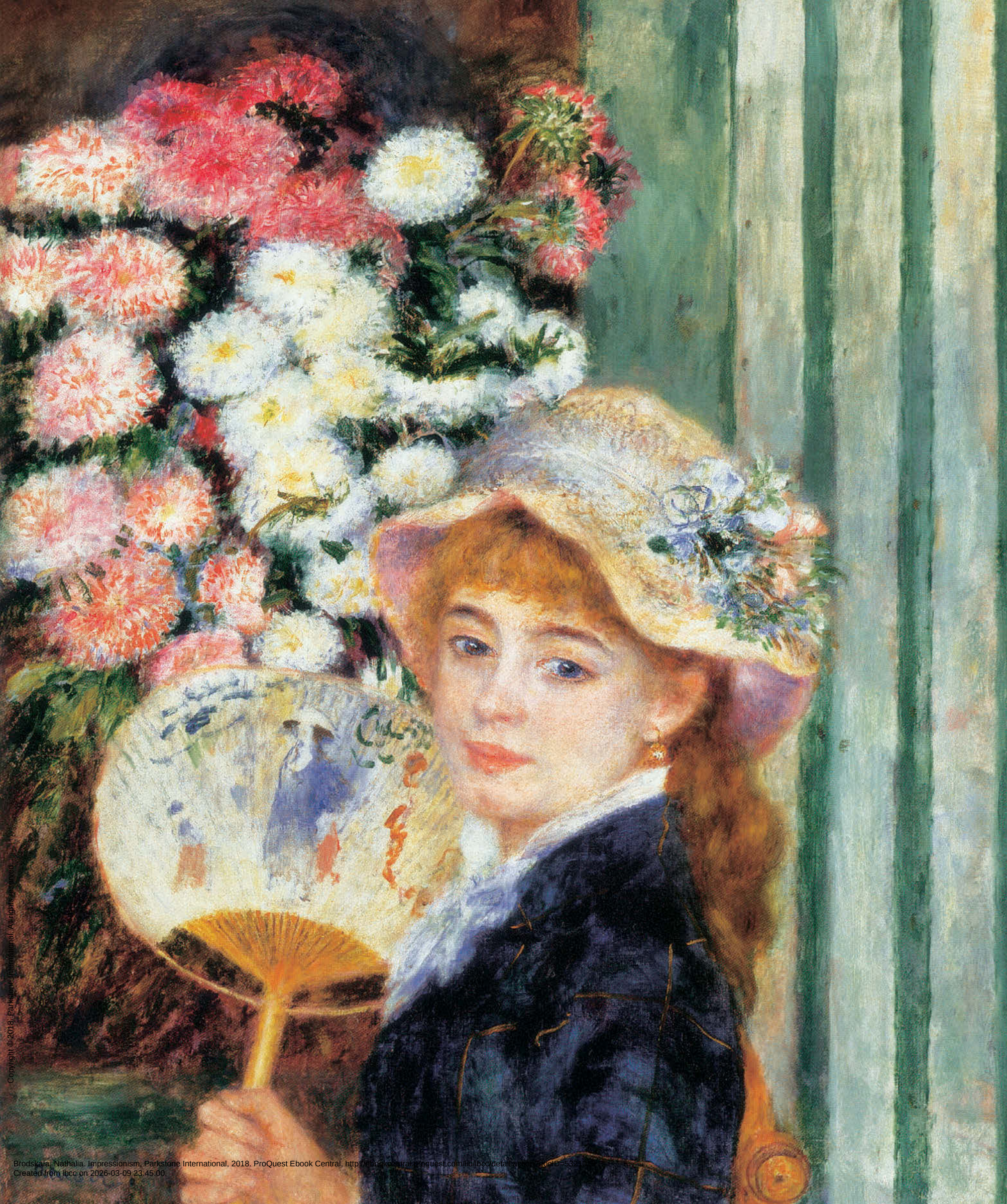

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friends. In Renoir's portraits, Monet is depicted working in the open air, reading a newspaper or overtly posing. And Renoir alone succeeded in conveying to posterity the charm of this independent personality. While studying under Gleyre, the group usually gathered at the Closerie des Lilas. The café remained a favourite place for artists until the middle of the twentieth century. The twenty-year-old Bazille, Renoir, Monet and Sisley argued heatedly about the new Renaissance in which they were to take part. Here they were joined by Camille Pissarro, who was not taking lessons from Gleyre. Bazille had met him at Manet's and brought him to the Closerie des Lilas. "A native of the Antilles, he spoke slowly, with a slight sing-song accent," Jean wrote from his father's words. "His manner of dress was careless, but what he said was profoundly thought through. He was destined to become the theoretician of the new school." At this time, in their heated debates about art, they rejected all the authorities of classical art with the extremism of youth. There were even calls to burn the Louvre, which did not in the least, as the old Renoir said, prevent them from remaining diligent pupils of Gleyre. As with every artist, Renoir's passions in art altered with age, but from childhood the Louvre remained for him something unassailable. "It is in the museum that people learn how to paint," he said. "I often argued about that with some of my friends who put up against me the absolute preferability of working outside, among nature. They disparaged Corot for reworking his landscapes in the studio." (A. André, *op. cit.*, p. 34).

Much later, when he was no longer young and already a mature artist, Renoir had the opportunity to see the works of Rembrandt in Holland, Velázquez, Goya and El Greco in Spain, Raphael in Italy. His encounter with each of the Old Masters brought him joy: "You have to be able to take from each master that satisfaction that he wanted to give us… Everyone sings his own song, if he has a voice. When I say that people learn how to paint in the Louvre, I don't mean that you need to scrape the varnish off the paintings so as to discover their secrets and begin to do again what Rubens or Raphael did. You should produce painting of your own time. But it is there, in the museum, that you get a taste for painting that nature alone cannot give you." (A. André, *op. cit.*, p. 36). At that time, however, when the friends gathered at the Closerie des Lilas and Renoir lived and breathed ideas of a new kind of art, he always had his own inspirations in the Louvre. "For me, in the Gleyre era, the Louvre was Delacroix," he confessed to Jean (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 113). In Delacroix's painting Renoir probably saw some kindred aspect, something particularly close to himself. Undoubtedly it was colour, as it was for all his friends, but perhaps he sensed more strongly than the others that elemental force in the painting, that impetuous flow of colour, which fascinated him too. After all, even in Camille Corot with his restrained use of colour, Renoir took delight in something that not everyone noticed: "Père Corot said: 'When I paint, I want to become a beast.' … I belong a little bit to the school of Père Corot." (A. André, *op. cit.*, p. 21). The years between 1863 and 1874 might be called the "plein-air decade" in Renoir's biography, because it was at that time that the future Impressionists mastered this "outdoor" style of painting. Renoir was still short of money. Life in Paris was not easy, but he did have friends. With no permanent home of his own in Paris, he sometimes lived with Monet, sometimes with Sisley. Bazille, who was better-off than the rest, did not abandon Renoir, Monet and Sisley. He was the one who paid the rent on the studio where they all worked together.

In 1867 Bazille wrote to his mother of his delight at being able to have as guests in his home such talented artists as Monet and Renoir. Renoir himself, as yet without a family, was not downcast by not having a place of his own. Later he would tell Jean how he and Claude Monet lived on beans. He spoke of the wonderful feeling of lightness he felt from not having any property and being able to live without worries or responsibilities, "hands in pockets" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 228), able at any moment to take off in pursuit of

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Alfred Sisley and His Wife (The Fiancés), 1868.
Oil on canvas, 106 x 74 cm.
Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne.

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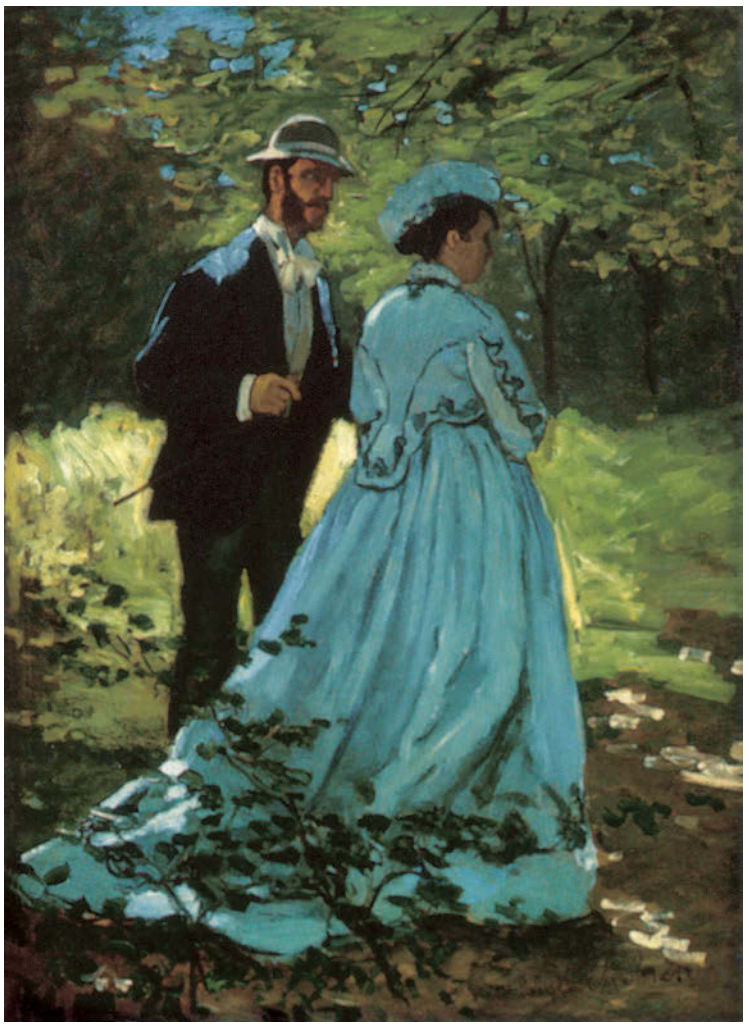
subject matter somewhere in the countryside where, incidentally, living was cheaper. “One should always be ready to set off for the motif,” he told Jean. “No luggage. A toothbrush and a piece of soap.” (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 227). The geographical scope of Renoir’s movements at that time was not particularly large – he had no money to travel far – but there were enough attractive motifs in the area around Paris. The more so, since it was on them that the Barbizon school had developed and Renoir and his friends felt themselves to be its direct successors as landscape painters. “Rousseau impressed me, Daubigny too,” the elderly Renoir recalled. “I immediately grasped what a great man Corot was. He will never age. He is not subject to fashion, like Vermeer van Delft. I hated Millet. His sentimental peasants made me think of actors dressed up for the part. My love was given to Diaz. He remained an example for me. I said to myself that, if I was an artist, I would want to paint like him, and that perhaps I would be able to do so. Then I like it a lot when there is a sense of damp in a forest landscape. And with Diaz you detect the smell of mushrooms, rotting leaves and moss. His paintings remind me of walks with my mother in the forests of Louveciennes and Marly.” (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 81). The Forest of Fontainebleau provided an inexhaustible stock of subject matter. Renoir and his friends acquired their own favourite places. Sometimes they lived in the village of Chailly-en-Bière, at the Auberge du Cheval Blanc run by Père Paillard; even more often in their especially beloved Marlotte, with Madame Mallet, or at the inn run by Mère Anthony. They all went out to paint a motif together – Monet, Bazille, Sisley, Pissarro and Renoir. Often Edmond Renoir accompanied them. Together with Sisley and another artist, Jules Le Cœur, Renoir walked right across the Forest of Fontainebleau and came out by the Château de Courances which appeared through the trees like a spectre of the elegant, decorative eighteenth century which so attracted him.



Claude Monet,
Bazille and Camille (Study for *Luncheon on the Grass*), 1865.
Oil on canvas, 93 x 68.9 cm.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Under the Arbor at the Moulin de la Galette, 1875.
Oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm.
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

In the late 1860s, Renoir painted landscape motifs around Ville-d’Avray where his parents had settled. Corot had painted in those same places, which lent them an especial attraction in Renoir’s eyes. But in Paris too at that time it was possible to find real plein-air subjects: Monet and Renoir went into raptures painting the Seine near the Chatou bridge, where, at La Grenouillère, among the many little islands, Alphonse Fournaise opened the restaurant that became one of the future Impressionists’ favourite places. Fournaise often refused to take Renoir’s money. “You’ve left us this landscape,” he said. “I warn you, no one will want it,” the artist riposted. “What does that matter, since it’s beautiful. And then I need something to hang on the wall to hide the damp patches,” Fournaise replied (J. Renoir, *op. cit.* p. 225). Renoir told Jean that it had been there, at Fournaise’s hostelry, that he had once met Guy de Maupassant. The painter and the writer lived in one and the same world; they had one and the same subject matter – contemporary life. Yet they perceived that world quite differently. “Renoir said of the writer: ‘He sees everything in shades of black!’ And he said of the painter: ‘He sees everything in shades of pink!’ Their views coincided on one thing. ‘Maupassant’s crazy!’ said Renoir. ‘Renoir’s crazy!’ said Maupassant.” (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 225). One more example of how often a writer and an artist see things with different eyes: in 1863 the Goncourt brothers mentioned in their diary the crudely and tastelessly painted main room of the inn at Marlotte and the extremely dubious public that gathered there; about 1866 Renoir depicted that same inn in the striking painting *At the Inn of Mother Anthony* (p.130).

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Pierre Auguste Renoir,

Odalisque (*Woman of Algiers*), 1870.

Oil on canvas, 69.2 x 122.6 cm.

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

The scene Renoir recreated on a large canvas, about two metres high, was not invented. That was how it was when they all gathered at Marlotte. “In the picture painted at Mère Anthony’s,” Jean Renoir tells us, “you can recognise Sisley in the standing figure, and Pissarro in the one with his back to you. The clean-shaven character is Frank Lamy; in the depth of the scene, with her back to you, is Madame Anthony; in the left foreground is the serving-girl Nana. The mongrel poodle lying on the floor was called Toto. He lost a back leg in an accident with a coach. My father tried to make him a wooden paw, but the peg-leg did not suit him. Toto did perfectly well with three paws.” (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 140).

From this moment on, Renoir’s friends became regular features of all his paintings. The colour scheme of his work had still not become impressionistically light. It is more reminiscent of the bituminous tones of

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Courbet or the brownish hue of Fantin-Latour's group portraits that makes them like old nineteenth-century photographs. The construction of the painting is remarkable, though: the figures of the servant-girl and the seated gentleman, both facing the viewer and both cut off at the vertical edge of the canvas, and the group of figures disposed almost in a semicircle create the sense of a real space. And that achieved by a twenty-five-year-old artist two years before Manet produced his *Luncheon in the Studio* (p. 44). In this period Renoir produced a large number of portraits. It was then more than ever that he painted Monet and Sisley, created his portrait of Sisley and his wife, and another of William Sisley, the artist's father. Renoir and Bazille painted each other in the studio they shared. Renoir often depicted the artist Jules Le Cœur with whom he became friendly at that time and in whose house he frequently stayed at Marlotte. Researchers into Renoir's work believe that it is

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Le Cœur, and not Sisley, who is shown standing in *At the Inn of Mother Anthony* (p. 130). Thanks to Le Cœur, Renoir began to get commissions for portraits and this subsequently became his main source of income. And, most important of all, not without the indirect involvement of Le Cœur, Renoir acquired his first muse. The sister of Le Cœur's young lady, a girl named Lise Tréhot, became Renoir's girlfriend. Lise did more than just pose for Renoir from 1865 to 1872. She became the first model of that Renoiresque world that the artist began to create. A very young Lise is depicted at her needlework in 1866, in some way calling to mind the models of Vermeer of whom Renoir was fond. Lise's face and figure, far removed from the Classical canons, inspired the artist to create paintings in the spirit of another of his idols – Gustave Courbet. In 1867, *Diana the Huntress* appeared with a bow in her hand and a dead deer at her feet. Renoir demonstrated once again the ease with which he could do what Gleyre had taught him. At the same time, his smooth, pastose manner of painting, laying on the paints with a palette-knife, and the admiration of the shapes in a buxom female body brings to mind *Mademoiselles* by Courbet that so shocked Paris in their time. This Diana, however, touchingly young, with eyes lowered in confusion and gracefully smooth movements, already belongs to the world of Renoir.

That same year, 1867, he painted *Lise with a Sunshade*. This plein-air painting, with a soft shadow on the face and the pink tone of the body shining through the thin fabric, has something in common with Bazille's *Family Portrait* and Monet's *Women in a Garden* (p. 100), foreshadowing the Impressionist painting that would burst out on their canvases three or four years later. For Renoir at that time, Lise Tréhot's face became a yardstick of feminine beauty. Perhaps for that reason, scholars believe that the woman in the portrait of the Sisleys is in actual fact also Lise. In 1870 she appeared in the next large canvas in the guise of a bather with a griffon. The Classical pose of Praxiteles's *Aphrodite of Cnidos* (models were often posed that way in the Academic school) does not conceal, but rather accentuates the striking individuality of her face, her luxuriant head of dark hair and the somewhat heavy forms of her body. And the ugly little dog intrudes on the Classical world as such a vivid, homely detail that Renoir's painting comes across as nothing other than a theatrical performance. Perhaps Renoir had potential as a theatrical director, which he himself did not recognise, because later his paintings seemed to take the form of staged scenes from life. It was in his youth, however, in the period when the artist's main, and only actress was Lise, that he played over in his canvases the experience provided by all his teachers in art, from Classical Greece to the modern era. The apotheosis of this period came with paintings in the spirit of Eugène Delacroix – understandably, since it was through the mediation of his painting that Renoir's generation took in the achievements of their predecessors in the realm of colour. In the 1860s Manet too succumbed to the temptation of Romantic motifs from Delacroix's repertoire: a watercolour depicting an odalisque in oriental costume has survived. In 1870 Renoir painted *Odalisque* (*Woman of Algiers*) (p. 138). He dressed Lise in fine silk and oriental brocade glittering with gold embroidery. He adorned her splendid black hair with an orange plume and surrounded her with magnificent carpets. In 1872, she married the architect Georges Brière de l'Isle, a friend of Le Cœur. When they parted, Renoir gave Lise his portrait of her in a white shawl. This time, the huge dark eyes of the model, the lace wrap, the little patch of red in the portrait's range of black, white and olive-green evoke associations with the painting of Francisco Goya. It would be no exaggeration to say that Lise brought Renoir success. He exhibited in the Salon several times in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Admittedly though, in 1864, even before he met Lise, one of his paintings was accepted for the Salon in the Grand Palais. It was entitled *Esmeralda Dancing with Her Goat around the Fire which Illuminates a Crowd of Vagrants*. Immediately after the exhibition closed, Renoir destroyed it. The

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Parisiennes in Algerian Costume, Harem, 1872.
Oil on canvas, 156 x 128.8 cm.
Matsukata Collection, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo.

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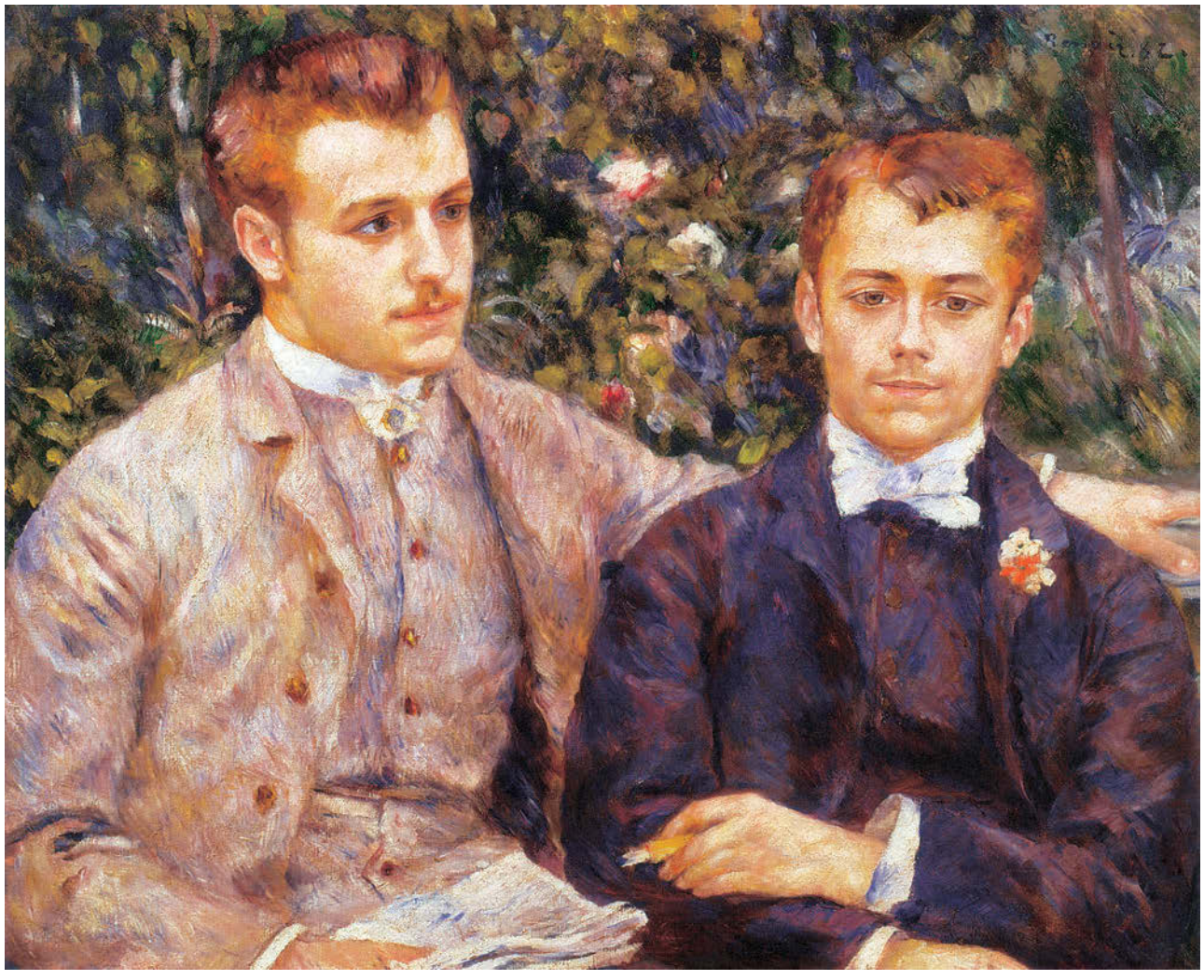

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Portrait of Charles and Georges Durand-Ruel, 1882.
Oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm.
Private collection, New York.

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
The Loge, 1874.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 63.5 cm.
Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery, London.

following year, 1865, the Salon accepted one landscape and his *Portrait of the Painter William Sisley* (p. 170). Renoir did not in any way disdain the Salon. In his old age he told Albert André: "I never wanted to present myself as a martyr and, if they had not rejected my paintings at the Salon, I would have been happy to keep on sending them there." (A. André, *op. cit.*, p. 33). In the period in question, however, he was rejected less often than the others. In 1867, the jury did turn down *Diana the Huntress*, on the other hand *Lise with a Sunshade* was in the 1868 Salon, *Summer* in the 1869 Salon, *Bather with a Griffon Dog* (p. 8) and *Odalisque* (*Woman of Algiers*) (p. 138) in the 1870 Salon. On 18 July 1870, normal life was interrupted when France declared war on Prussia. The very idea of war was alien to Renoir, but he was obliged to present himself at the mobilisation centre in the Hôtel des Invalides, where he was pronounced fit for service. Prince Bibesco, to whom Renoir had been introduced by his friend, the architect Charles Le Cœur, offered to get the artist a posting with the General Staff, where he was serving himself. Renoir turned down the offer. Later he explained this to Jean: "I am very scared of explosions, but I could not bear the thought that someone else would take my place in battle, while I was busy with painting with General Barrail. If that someone else had been killed, I would not have slept for the rest of my life. I informed Bibesco that my place was wherever fate decreed." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 149). Fate decreed that Renoir, who did not know the first thing about horses, was sent to the cavalry. He found himself in Bordeaux, then Tarbes. The painter's captain in the cavalry was very pleased with his achievements: "Renoir is splendid at finding a common language with the horses. He lets them do what they want. And they end up doing exactly what he wanted them to." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 150). The captain's daughter was interested in painting. Renoir gave her lessons and at the same time made portraits of

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Pierre Auguste Renoir,

Dance at the Moulin de la Galette, Montmartre, 1876.

Oil on canvas, 131 x 175 cm.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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her. The idyll ended unhappily, however. Renoir fell seriously ill and the doctors in the Bordeaux hospital only just managed to save his life. In March 1871, he was demobilised and returned to Paris – to the Latin Quarter, where before the war he had rented an apartment together with Bazille, and later with the musician Edmond Maître, who was also a lover of painting. It was there that he learned of Bazille's death – a shock which affected him more deeply than the war itself. The story of Renoir the cavalryman had its continuation in his painting. In 1872 he produced *Riders in the Bois de Boulogne* (p. 23). The woman who posed for the magnificent *Amazon* was Madame Darras, the wife of Captain Darras, whom Renoir had met through the Le Cœurs. The boy on the pony was Charles Le Cœur's son. The main character of this painting is, however, undoubtedly the woman's steed – yet Renoir would never again depict horses in his work. The painting's enormous dimensions – each side of the almost square canvas extends to about two and a half metres – turn it into a monumental work, forcibly bringing to mind David's *Portrait of Count Potocki*. Renoir told Ambroise Vollard that he had worked on the painting in the grand hall of the Ecole Militaire, something that Captain Darras had arranged for him. There are two purely Renoiresque aspects to the painting. First, he was unable to resist the charm of a Parisienne "whose skin does not reflect light", the elegance of the black veil and the rose pinned to the black suit. Second, the painting's fairly light palette harmoniously linked the figures in the foreground with the landscape. Still missing here are the blinding sun and the red reflexes on water, but the softness of the golden trees in the background and the calm surface of the lake assert the proposition promulgated by the future Impressionists: there is no need to travel far in order to capture living nature; it exists in the very heart of Paris. All that is needed is for the artist to take off those golden-brown spectacles which paintings in museums taught him to see nature through. Renoir had as yet only taken the first step in that direction: his painting still retained an overall warm tone. Subsequently, though, events began to develop rapidly. The painting was rejected for the Salon. It was displayed at the Salon des Refusés organised in 1873 behind the Grand Palais. This probably dispersed Renoir's illusions about his possibly achieving a compromise with the official Salon.

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Portrait of the Actress Jeanne Samary, 1877.
Oil on canvas, 56 x 47 cm.
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
The Actress Jeanne Samary, 1878.
Oil on canvas, 174 x 101.5 cm.
The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

Finally, the association of artists about which Bazille and Pissarro had already been dreaming in the late 1860s came about. Nevertheless, the organisers managed to bring together twenty-nine artists who presented 165 works. Edmond Renoir was responsible for the catalogue and so, indirectly, for Louis Leroy, a critic writing for *Le Charivari*, coining the contemptuous word "Impressionism". Edmond asked Claude Monet to change the uninspiring title he had given to one of his landscapes, as a result of which it became Impression. Even in old age, Renoir recalled with bitterness: "The only thing that we gained from that exhibition turned out to be the label 'Impressionism' which I hate!" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 173). Despite the fact that the majority of critics in Europe and America derided the exhibition, called it comic and announced that the artists had declared war on beauty, it aroused an exceptionally large response. The venture was not a commercial success, but an image of each of the Impressionists did indeed begin to take shape in the minds of interested visitors. Renoir displayed six oil paintings and one pastel. Viewers' attention was drawn by the large canvases: *Dancer*, *Parisienne* (or *Lady in Blue*) – for which Henriette Henriot, an actress at the Odéon Theatre, posed, and *The Loge* (p. 143) (which was

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also called *L'Avant-Scène*). From his father's reminiscences, Jean Renoir described how the public received the Impressionists' paintings: "They went to the exhibition to have a laugh. Faced with the characters created by Degas, Cézanne, and even Renoir's charming girls, people could barely contain their anger. *The Loge* (p. 143) evoked particular outrage. 'What ugly mugs! Where did he fish up his models?' And that was my Uncle Edmond and the delightful Nini!" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 173). In his memoirs, Georges Rivière informs us that between 1874 and 1880 Renoir's usual model was the pretty blonde Nini, a serious and modest girl. In the painting in question she became the archetype of the Renoir portrait: no allusions to her social status, character or mood – only the delight of porcelain skin, slightly painted lips and an elegant dress, only the transient charm of the Parisienne. "Renoir has a great future ahead of him," Burty wrote. "His *Avant-Scène*, especially in the light, achieves absolute illusion. The powdered, dispassionate face of the lady, her white-gloved hands, one of which holds a lorgnette, while the other is plunged in the muslin of her handkerchief, the thrown back head and body of the man are pieces of painting worthy of both attention and praise" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 289). For the first time in this painting, a wave of light, harmonious, unrestrained colour broke across Renoir's canvas in conjunction with a composition worthy of the lessons provided by Classical teachers. Yet the framework of diagonals in the strict pyramidal construction is not immediately striking: it is concealed by the large figures advanced towards the viewer. La Loge arouses vague associations with Caravaggio's compositions, and even stronger ones with Manet's *Balcony* (p.45). Renoir absorbed ideas and influences and then resolutely followed his own path. As early as 1870, the critic Arsène Houssaye acknowledged those qualities in him: "Gleyre, his teacher, must be very surprised that he brought up a prodigal son like this, who laughs at all the laws of grammar, because he dares to do things his own way. But Gleyre is too great an artist not to recognise art however it might express itself" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 283). For Renoir, the first Impressionist exhibition was the moment his vision of the artist was affirmed. This period in Renoir's life was marked by one further significant event. In 1873 he moved to Montmartre, to the house at 35 Rue Saint-Georges, where he lived until 1884. Renoir remained loyal to Montmartre for the rest of his life. Here he found his plein-air subjects, his models and even his family. It was in the 1870s that Renoir acquired the friends who would stay with him for the remainder of his days. One of them was the art-dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, who began to buy his paintings in 1872. Renoir said that "père Durand" was a courageous and honest man and that without him the Impressionists would not have survived. More than once he was on the brink of ruin, but he did not let them down. And even when Durand-Ruel was unable to buy paintings due to lack of money, he gave Renoir a certain sum every month. "He was sufficiently wily to sense that there was something to be made from it," Renoir said, "and I think that he genuinely liked our painting, especially Monet's" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 170).

In summer, Renoir continued to paint a great deal outdoors together with Monet. He would travel out to Argenteuil, where Monet rented a house for his family. Edouard Manet sometimes worked with them too. At Argenteuil Renoir also made the acquaintance of Gustave Caillebotte, a marine engineer and neighbour of Monet, who painted in his spare time. Not only did Caillebotte become a close friend of the Impressionists, he also supported them financially by buying their paintings. The collection of works which Caillebotte bequeathed to the nation formed the basis of the present-day Musée d'Orsay. At an unsuccessful sale that Renoir, Monet, Sisley and Berthe Morisot organised at the Hôtel Drouot in 1875, Victor Choquet, an official with the Customs administration, bought his first paintings by Renoir. That was the start of another long friendship. Choquet immediately commissioned Renoir to paint a portrait of his wife. The artist told Jean

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Motherhood (Aline and Pierre), 1886.
Oil on canvas, 74 x 54 cm.
Private collection.

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how, while cutting back on clothing and food, Choquet built a collection of Louis XV and Louis XVI antiques. He even had paintings by Watteau. Choquet was one of the first to grasp that it was Renoir and his friends who were the direct inheritors of eighteenth-century art. Renoir said that Choquet was "the greatest French collector since the time of the kings, and perhaps since the time of the popes" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 207). Among Renoir's closest friends in the 1870s and 1880s were Georges Rivière, an official at the Ministry of Finance, who later wrote the book *Renoir et ses amis*, and one other civil servant, Lestringuez, who was preoccupied with occult sciences and hypnotism. Lestringuez brought his friend, the composer Chabrier. Of course, other artists were constantly calling at the house in the Rue Saint-Georges, among them Renoir's childhood friend Cordey, Pierre Frank-Lamy and Norbert Gœneutte. They often posed for him. During this period, Renoir also made friends with Paul Lhote, a former sailor and traveller, who became his companion on many trips. In the evenings, Renoir would go down to the Place Pigalle and the Café Nouvelle-Athènes,

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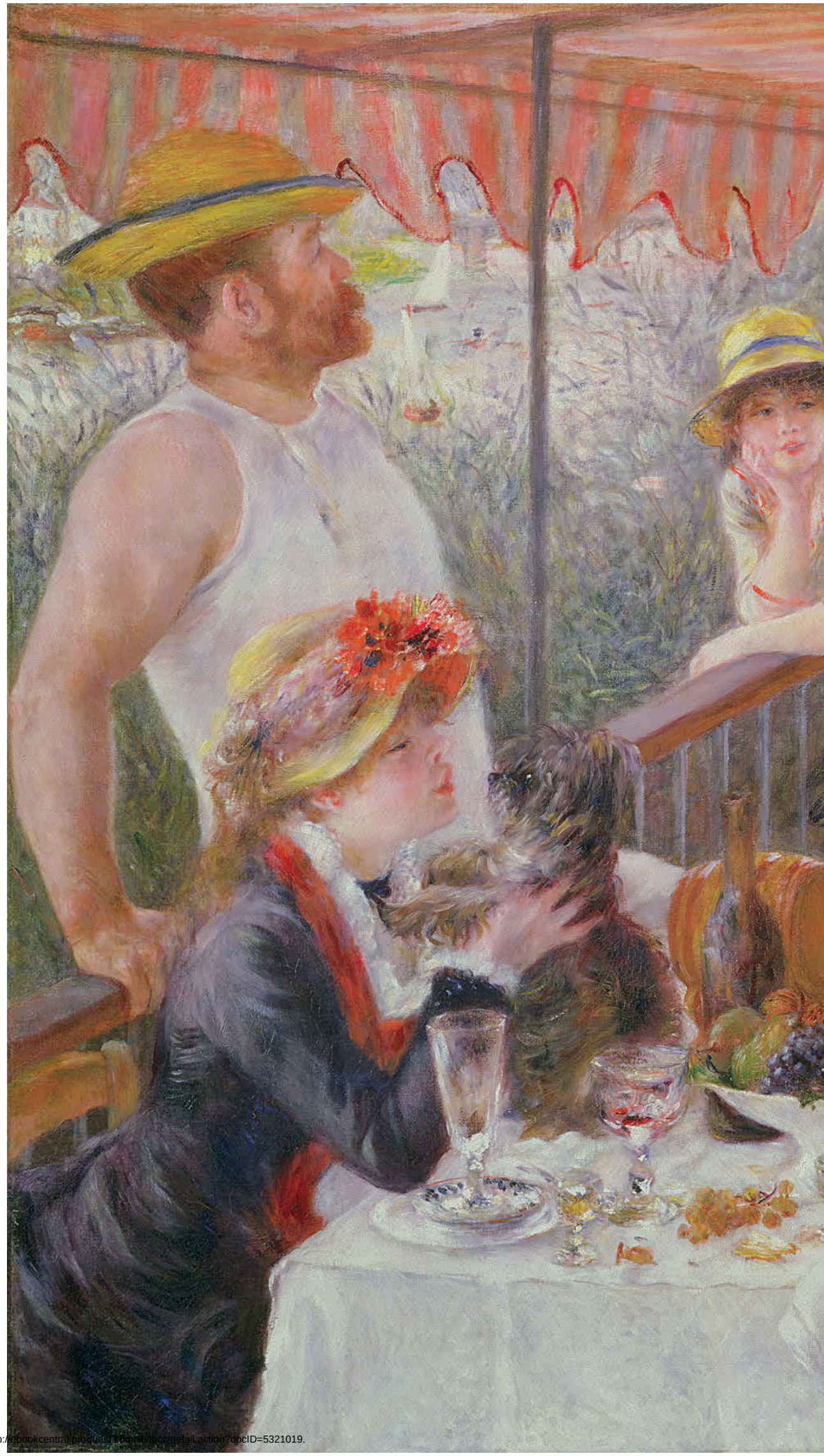

Pierre Auguste Renoir,

Luncheon of the Boating Party, c. 1880.

Oil on canvas, 129.7 x 172.7 cm.

The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

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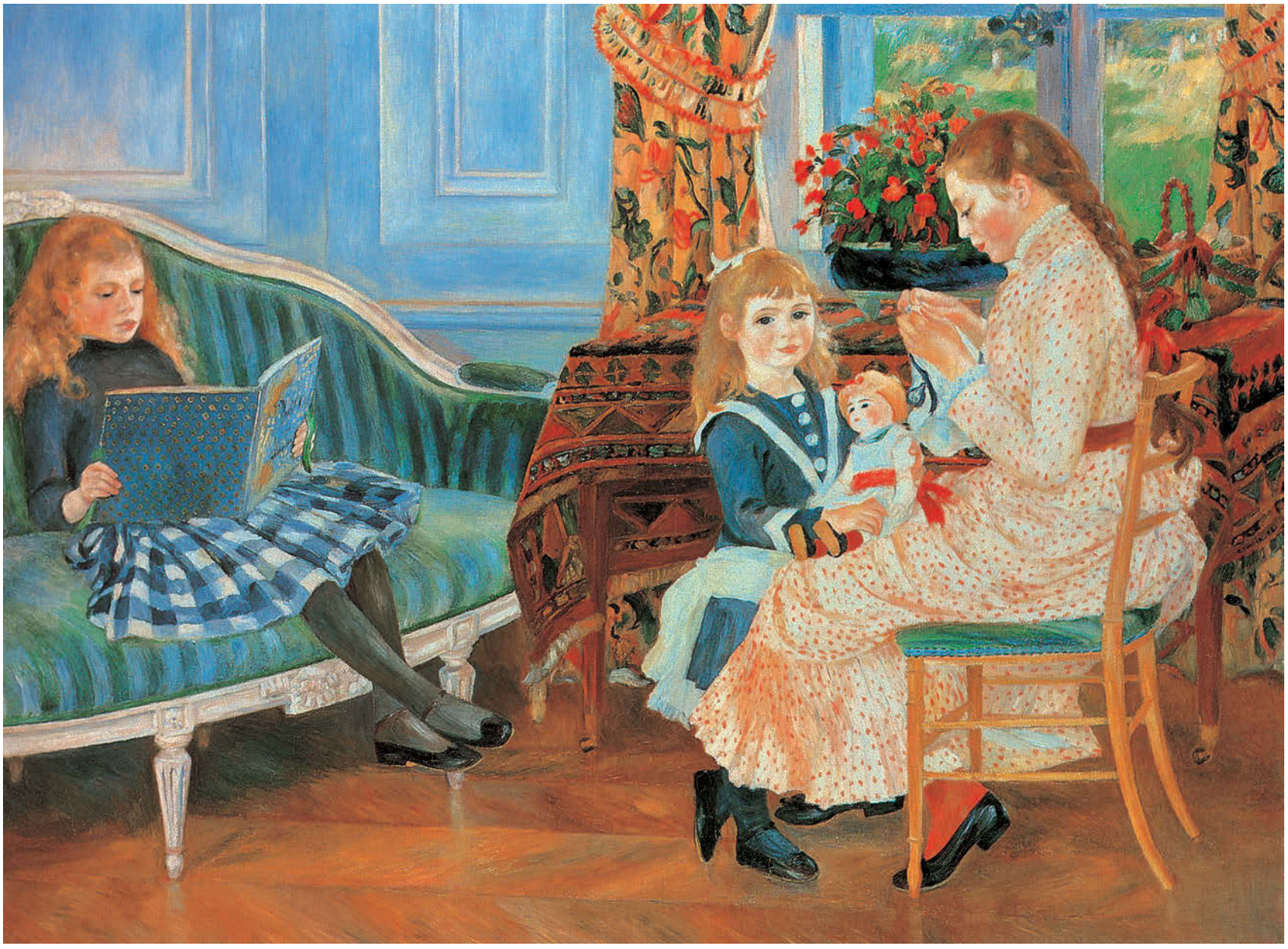

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Children's Afternoon at Wargemont, 1884.
Oil on canvas, 127 x 173 cm.
Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

which became a meeting place for his circle in the 1870s. It seems that the engraver Marcellin Desboutin "discovered" the place and it was here in 1876 that Degas painted him together with the actress Ellen André for his *In a Café* (*The Absinthe Drinker*) (p. 220). Monet, Sisley, Pissarro and Cézanne very rarely appeared at the Nouvelle-Athènes. The 1870s in Montmartre were possibly the happiest time in Renoir's creative biography. The little neglected garden by the studio on the Rue Cortot that he began renting in 1875 became the plein-air setting which generated the finest paintings of this period. "The garden is mysterious and noble, like the paradise in Zola's work," Renoir said (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 215). The garden itself, in which one or the other of his friends could always be found, became a theme to be painted (*Garden in the Rue Cortot, Montmartre*). Here he worked on *Summer House*, *The Swing* (p. 158) and *Dance at the Moulin de la Galette, Montmartre* (pp. 144-145) – one of the most important paintings he ever produced. Renoir found the subject for this last work right by his house, on the Rue Cortot, in the restaurant called Le Moulin de la Galette. It is more of a motif than a subject: Renoir's canvases never did have a subject as such, since any kind of narrative or descriptiveness in painting was repugnant to him. "The most significant thing about our movement, I think, is that we liberated painting from the subject," he told Jean. "I can paint flowers and call them simply Flowers without telling any story" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 199). Montmartre was gradually

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becoming built up with houses, block by block. A certain Monsieur Debray turned the last windmill still standing on the hill into a restaurant. It got its name from the tasty galettes (flat cakes) which it served.

On Saturday evenings and Sundays, shop assistants, seamstresses, young artists, writers, actresses and simply light-hearted girls from Montmartre would gather here to dance. Renoir told Jean that he had sat there for hours at a time, absorbing the special aroma of the Moulin de la Galette, like Zola had absorbed the spirit of the French countryside when he was working on his novel *La Terre*. He made sketches on the spot. In order to paint the figures in the painting en plein-air, Renoir had to carry the large canvas out into the garden. As always he peopled the painting with close friends: on the right, at the table, we can identify Frank-Lamy, Gœneutte and Georges Rivière; among the dancers, Lestringuez and Paul Lhote. In the centre of the foreground are two sisters, Estelle and Jeanne, whom Renoir found in Montmartre (like, incidentally, almost all his models in this period). With the help of a little stratagem – introducing himself to the girls' parents – he persuaded them that it was safe to pose for him. It was in Montmartre too that he discovered Anna, who featured in many of his paintings; Angèle, who helped him to rent the garden with the swing that then appeared in *The Swing*; and finally, Margot, whom we see for the first time in *Dance at the Moulin de la Galette, Montmartre* (pp. 144-145), dancing with the tall Spaniard Don Pedro Vidal de Solares y Cardenas, another of the artist's

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
A Girl with a Watering Can, 1876.
Oil on canvas, 100.3 x 73.2 cm.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Child with a Whip, 1885.
Oil on canvas, 105 x 75 cm.
The State Hermitage Museum,
St Petersburg.

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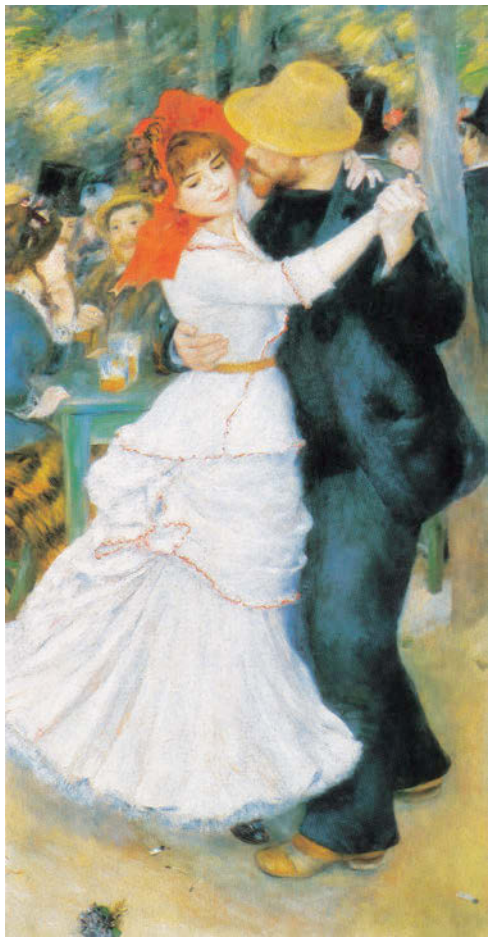

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
The Dance at Bougival (detail), 1883.
Oil on canvas, 181.9 x 98.1 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Dance in the City, 1883.
Oil on canvas, 180 x 90 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

acquaintances. Margot later posed for a whole number of paintings, including *La Tasse de Chocolat*, accepted for the Salon in 1878 under the title *Café*. In 1879 she died of an illness which the doctors were unable to treat. This loss was a severe blow to Renoir. In *Dance at the Moulin de la Galette, Montmartre* (pp. 144-145), Renoir did more than create a picture of a scene familiar to the inhabitants of Montmartre. The mobility of his manner of painting, the vibration of patches of light and shade create an atmosphere of natural vitality. It is interesting that Georges Rivière, in an article for the newspaper *L'Impressionniste*, approached this painting by his beloved Renoir from a rather unexpected point of view: "Monsieur Renoir can be justly proud of his Ball. Never has his inspiration been greater. It is a page of history, a precious monument of Parisian life possessing the strictest precision. No one before him ever thought to set down facts from everyday life on a canvas of such great size… It is a historical painting. Monsieur Renoir and his friends have understood that historical painting is not a more or less entertaining illustration of fables from the past. They have opened up a course which others will undoubtedly follow. Let those who wish to produce historical painting, produce the history of their own era, instead of stirring up the dust of bygone centuries. What meaning do operetta kings wrapped in blue or yellow robes with sceptres in their hands and crowns on their heads hold for us?… What record of the history or our age will be left to posterity by artists proffering works of that sort?" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 309). Renoir, of course, had no idea that he was painting a historical picture. And he had nothing of which to be particularly proud at the time either, since he had still not managed to achieve success with the public.

At the Second Impressionist Exhibition in 1876, Renoir mainly presented portraits, because that was the genre in which he was trying to earn his living. Friends introduced him to people who might commission works from him. The existing small circle of admirers of his art was joined by the financiers Henri Cernuschi and Charles Ephrussi, who began buying his paintings. Eugène Murer, the owner of a restaurant on the Boulevard Voltaire, asked Renoir and Pissarro to paint the interior of the restaurant's dining-room. Every Wednesday he fed a whole company of artists free of charge. Eventually, he also commissioned portraits, of himself and his sister, from Renoir. In 1879, Renoir met the diplomat Paul Bérard, who became another friend and patron. The artist spent the summer at Wargemont, the Bérards' estate near Dieppe, where he painted a large number of landscapes and portraits, as well as *Mussel Fishers*. It was there, too, that Renoir met Doctor Emile Blanche, for whom he produced two dessus-de-portes with subjects from Tannhäuser. Yet the income generated by the sale of those works was only sufficient to buy the bare necessities of life.

In 1877, at the Third Impressionist Exhibition, Renoir presented a whole panorama of over twenty paintings. They included landscapes created in Paris, on the Seine, outside the city and in Claude Monet's garden; studies of women's heads and bouquets of flowers; portraits of Sisley, the actress Jeanne Samary, the writer Alphonse Daudet and the politician Spuller; and also *The Swing* (p. 158) and *Dance at the Moulin de la Galette, Montmartre* (pp. 144-145). The labels on some of the paintings indicated that they were already the property of Georges Charpentier. The artist's friendship with the Charpentier family was to play a significant role in shaping his destiny. Jean Renoir reported that Renoir had painted a portrait of Madame Charpentier senior back in the late 1860s, but his modesty and shyness had later prevented him from keeping up the acquaintance.

At a sale held in the Hôtel Drouot in 1875, the young publisher Georges Charpentier noticed and bought a landscape by Renoir entitled *Anglers*. He had just inherited his father's sizeable publishing business and married Marguerite Lemonnier, the daughter of a noted jeweller. The couple kept open house at their home – 11 Rue de Grenelle. Madame Charpentier's salon was frequented by writers, actors, artists and politicians.

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Besides Maupassant, Zola, the Goncourts and Daudet, whom Georges Charpentier published, it was even possible to come across Victor Hugo and Ivan Turgenev there. Renoir was a constant caller at the house. He even signed some of his letters to Madame Charpentier, "your domestic artist". His painting could be seen at the gallery called La Vie Moderne which Georges Charpentier founded. It was in this environment that he found new customers, such as the Bérards and Daudet, who went on to become his friends. Here too he found more models, the finest of whom was the Comédie-Française actress Jeanne Samary. Renoir was so fascinated with Jeanne, that he even became a frequent visitor to the Comédie-Française. "To do that, I had to want to see her very badly," he said. "If ever there was a place where people don't laugh, that's the one! Fortunately, she often played Musset!" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 207). In his depictions of the actress, Renoir achieved what was the finest quality of his portraits – complete naturalness. "The portrait of Mademoiselle Samary is truly beautiful," Rivière wrote. "As beautiful, I would say, as the original…" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 310). Renoir produced much work to commissions from the Charpentiers themselves. He painted two decorative panels on which he depicted the couple meeting guests at the entrance to their house and five portraits of members of the family, one of which was the *Portrait of Madame Charpentier and Her Children*. This last work was connected with significant events in his life. Edmond Renoir related that when his brother painted that portrait in the Charpentiers' home "not one object was moved from the place

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
La Grenouillière, 1869.
Oil on canvas, 66.5 x 81 cm.
Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.

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it always occupied. Nothing was specially prepared with the intention of lending importance to one part of the painting or another." (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 336). The interior of a room decorated with fashionable Japanese screens, a harmony of light blues, pinks, greens and blacks, made the work genuinely elegant. By pulling strings, Marguerite Charpentier managed to get this canvas accepted for the 1879 Salon together with a formal portrait of Jeanne Samary. For Renoir this meant success and the promise of new commissions. From that point he stopped taking part in the Impressionist exhibitions. Zola, in an article for *Le Voltaire*, explained the artist's position in this way: "Monsieur Renoir was the first to grasp that you will never get commissions in that way [through the Impressionist exhibitions]. And since he needed to live, he again began sending his work to the official Salon, for which he was called a renegade. I am for independence in all things, but I affirm that Monsieur Renoir's behaviour seems to me completely rational. One has to understand the great advertising opportunities which the official Salon provides for young artists. With our established customs that is the only place where they can attain a genuine victory." (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 277). At the Seventh Impressionist Exhibition, held in 1882, Renoir was again represented with twenty-five works, but that was on the initiative of Paul Durand-Ruel, who made the paintings that he owned available. Renoir was so dubious about some of the artists included in the exhibition that he hastened to send Durand-Ruel a telegram from Estaque in the south

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
The Bathers in the Seine, La Grenouillère, 1868.
Oil on canvas, 59 x 80 cm.
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

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of France. “Those paintings of mine in your possession are your property. I cannot prevent you from doing what you want with them, but I am not the one who is exhibiting them.” (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 120).

By 1882, Renoir really did have good cause to fear losing the success that he had achieved in the Salon. Now he had a wife to support. The story began a little earlier, in about 1880. At that time Renoir’s paintings and drawings increasingly featured the face of a young girl with round cheeks and a short, slightly turned up nose. Sometimes we get a glimpse of this face in the crowd on the Place Pigalle, leaving behind it a sense of fleeting happiness. Sometimes we detect its presence in the image of a red-headed girl reading, sometimes in the lissom figure of a girl taking her seat in a boat. Then finally, in the 1881 painting *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (pp. 150-151), a portrait of her appears: she is depicted in the bottom left-hand corner of the canvas, in a fanciful, fashionable hat, holding a Pekinese in her hands. Her name was Aline Charigot and in 1880 she was twenty-one years old. Renoir met her in Madame Camille’s dairy shop on the Rue Saint-Georges. She lived close by with her mother and earned her living by dressmaking. Like Renoir, Aline occasionally visited the shop, where it was possible to get a cheap lunch of soup with cheese for dessert. The owner of the shop had hopes of marrying one of her own daughters to the artist, but fate decided otherwise. The mutual attraction between Renoir and Aline was impossible to overlook. Jean Renoir hit on a profound truth when he stated that his father began depicting his mother long before the two met. It really is the case that in many earlier paintings, such as *The First Outing* of 1876, the model already resembles Aline. Jean tells a story that when Renoir was drawing the profile of Marie-Antoinette on porcelain plates, the owner of the workshop warned him: “Careful! The customers won’t recognise their idol. You need to make the nose a bit longer.” (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 235). In terms of outward appearance, Aline was a striking match for the female type which Renoir had created in his work. But in her Renoir found much more: simplicity and sincerity, which had not been lost in the move from her native village of Essoyes to Paris, calm, consideration and an understanding of the significance of the artist’s work, all of which he badly needed. Renoir had already turned forty but now his youth seemed to return to him. Georges Rivière said that when Renoir was painting Aline, he would sometimes stop, put down his palette and simply look at her for a long time – “Why strain himself? After all, what he wanted to create already existed!” (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 232). Aline was an excellent dancer. She loved the water, could row and quickly learned to swim. “The lovers almost moved entirely to the bank of the Seine,” Jean wrote. “The Restaurant Fournaise was where they had their dates… At Fournaise’s they would meet a band of regular customers who seem to have protected their idyll. The artist Caillebotte took Aline under his wing like a little sister. Ellen André and Mademoiselle Henriot accepted her and got it into their heads that they should smooth the rough edges off this charming peasant girl.” She listened, touched by such signs of friendship, but carried on doing things in her own way. “I didn’t want to lose my accent and become a sham Parisienne.” (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 232-233). Renoir did find cause to worry, though – not so much on account of Aline’s mother’s disapproval at her romance with an impoverished artist, as because of his awareness of the difference in their ages. Renoir was so tormented by doubt that he did something quite uncharacteristic of him: he left Paris on a long journey, hoping to rid himself of thoughts of Aline.

In the period 1881–82 Renoir moved about many times from place to place, perpetuating them in his work mainly in the form of landscapes. He continued to paint on the Seine, at Chatou and Bougival. His habit of working in those places was so dear to him that he turned down the critic Théodore Duret’s invitation to

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
The Swing, 1876.
Oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm.
Musée d’Orsay, Paris.

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make a trip to England. “The weather’s set fair and I have got models. That is my only excuse.” (F. Daulte, *Pierre Auguste Renoir. Figures* (1860-1896), Lausanne, 1971, p. 45). Perhaps the true reason was Aline – Renoir was just on the point of finishing *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (pp. 150-151). Yet in that same year, 1881, Renoir (together with his friend Cordey) visited Algeria for the first time, bringing back *Banana Plantation* and *Arab Holiday*. After a short stay in Dieppe, he set off for Italy. He travelled through Milan, Venice and Florence. “I saw Raphael in Rome,” he wrote to Durand-Ruel. “It’s truly splendid and I should have seen it sooner. Everything is full of mastery and wisdom. He did not seek the impossible, like I do. I like Ingres better for oil painting, but the frescoes are delightful for simplicity and grandeur… Italy is beautiful. But Paris… o, Paris…” (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 117). He visited Naples, Sorrento and Capri. He saw Pompeii. On Sicily, in Palermo, he met his idol Richard Wagner and even had the opportunity to spend half an hour drawing him. Admittedly, this encounter failed to live up to his expectations. “I look like a Protestant clergyman,” was the great composer’s comment on the drawing.” (F. Daulte, *op. cit.*, p. 46). After that, Renoir returned to the south of France, where he worked together with Cézanne. In Estaque he fell ill with influenza and pneumonia and in March 1882 he again headed for Algeria. “Dear Monsieur Durand-Ruel,” he wrote from there, “I have installed myself close to Algiers itself and am conducting negotiations with the Arabs in search of models, which is not a very easy business as it is a question of who is better at tricking whom. Still, I hope this time to bring you paintings with figures…” (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 124). In May 1882, Renoir returned to Paris, with Aline still on his mind. He wrote to her and she met him at the station. That moment was in effect the start of a new life for Renoir. Money was needed to support a wife. Fortunately the artist’s efforts and stubborn work had not been in vain as he was now receiving commissions for portraits. Among his patrons was his old friend Paul Durand-Ruel. Renoir painted portraits of his five children and three panels depicting a dance as well as doing a wall painting in his house.

In 1883 Durand-Ruel organised Renoir’s first one-man show on the Boulevard de la Madeleine. It included seventy paintings. Although Durand-Ruel was not always successful in his attempts to sell the Impressionists’ paintings, he decided to open another gallery in New York. Finally, in the 1880s Renoir hit a “winning streak”. He was commissioned by rich financiers, the owner of the Grands Magasins du Louvre and Senator Goujon. His paintings were exhibited in London and Brussels, as well as at the Seventh International Exhibition held at Georges Petit’s in Paris in 1886. In a letter to Durand-Ruel, then in New York, Renoir wrote: “The Petit exhibition has opened and is not doing badly, so they say. After all, it’s so hard to judge about yourself. I think I have managed to take a step forward towards public respect. A small step, but even that is something” (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 138). Renoir was never inclined to overestimate himself. In the 1880s he travelled extensively. Renoir often painted in the towns and on the beaches of Normandy. He visited the Channel Islands of Guernsey and Jersey with Aline and Paul Lhote. In the winter of 1883 Renoir travelled around the Riviera with Claude Monet. The trip proved too short to produce anything serious, but their mood was excellent. “We saw everything, or almost everything, from Marseilles to Genoa. It’s all splendid,” Renoir wrote to Durand-Ruel in a rare expression of delight. “There is no horizon at all. This evening the mountains were pink. Hyères is splendid. Saint-Raphael, Monte-Carlo and Bordighera are overgrown with Italian pines, but at the same time they remain very changeable.” Yet the luxuriant nature of the south was never so productive in Renoir’s work as his customary motifs of northern France and the Seine. “The awkward thing about Italy,” the artist told Jean, “is that it is too beautiful. Why paint, when it’s such a pleasure simply to look?” (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 251).

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Young Woman Seated (*Thought*),
c. 1876-1877.
Oil on canvas, 66 x 55.5 cm.
The Barber Institute of Fine Arts,
Birmingham.

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In the summer of 1884 Aline was expecting a baby and Renoir travelled alone. He made for La Rochelle, from where he wrote to Durand-Ruel: "The last painting by Corot that I saw produced a wild desire in me to see this port and, despite the vague memories I have of the painting, I am enchanted by the exceptional fidelity of tone… There are some beautiful motifs here, which I will not be able to paint. It has been raining for days on end, but the little I have done or will do is still some progress" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 130). In March 1885 Renoir's first son, Pierre, was born. To pay the doctor who attended at the birth, Renoir painted the walls of his apartment with flowers – the dream of decorative works was still not extinct, but after the artist's journeys to Italy it had acquired a nostalgic quality. In the autumn the Renoirs travelled to Aline's native village, Essoyes in Champagne. The artist frequently made sketches of his wife feeding their child. A year later he used these sketches to produce the painting *Motherhood* (*Aline and Pierre*) (p. 149). "With his keen, tender brush he afforded his heart the joy of fondling the dimples on the necks and the folds on the little fists of his infants and of shouting to all mankind about his paternal love," Jean Renoir wrote (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 319). In Renoir's creative life the 1880s were not so serene. In discussions with Ambroise Vollard he was talking about the sense of an impasse which had come upon him perhaps as early as 1883. Dissatisfaction with the former Impressionistic manner of painting prompted the artist to search for something new, looking, as before, even further back in Classical art. It seemed to him that he did not know how to paint or to draw. In a state of depression, he destroyed a whole group of finished works. At this difficult moment, it was Ingres who came to Renoir's assistance – that very Ingres who had been scorned by Renoir's circle during his youth.

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Girls at Piano, 1892.
Oil on canvas, 116 x 90 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
A Woman Playing the Guitar, 1897.
Oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm.
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon.

In Renoir's artistic biography, the 1880s are customarily called the Ingres period. A tendency to stricter draughtsmanship, precise line and clear form, and even to a greater use of local colour can be traced in all the paintings of that time. To some extent they can already be detected in *Luncheon*, and more so in *Motherhood* (*Aline and Pierre*) (p. 149) and *The Umbrellas* (p. 128). This last work, painted in two stages – started in 1881 and completed in 1885 – is astonishing evidence of the way in which the artist's manner of painting evolved. It is fairly soft and Impressionistic on the right-hand side, it is far tougher and more laconic on the left. In Normandy in 1884, Renoir painted a portrait of Paul Bérard's three daughters: *Children's Afternoon at Wargemont* (p. 152). Apart from the Ingres-like purity of line and form, this large painting also has one quality unique to Renoir's way of working in this period. Its pink and pale blue palette calls to mind the painting of the Rococo, of the eighteenth century which figured largely in Renoir's dreams. "I have again taken up the old soft and light manner of painting, so as not to be unfaithful to it any more," he wrote to Durand-Ruel from Essoyes in the autumn of 1885. "… There is nothing new in this, but it is a direct continuation of the works of the eighteenth century" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 131). He was thinking specifically of Fragonard and Watteau, whose works he had loved since childhood, since the time when his greatest dream was to paint porcelain at the Sèvres factory. In 1885, Renoir painted the large composition *In the Garden*, which became a kind of farewell from him to the "perpetual holiday" of *La Grenouillère* (p. 156) and the *Moulin de la Galette*. The quivering of touch, the vibration of light and shade were left behind. In Renoir's new painting

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everything was calm and stable. The bright light intensifies the green of the leaves and the reflexes from the bouquet of flowers on the yellow straw hat. Again his model resembles Aline, but now it is already that new Aline who embodies the peace of his family life. The Renoir family were constant visitors to the village of Essoyes. "I am becoming more and more a resident of the country," he wrote to Eugène Manet in 1888, "and I have discovered rather late that winter is the really good time of year. A fire in a large grate never causes a migraine. The flames are jolly and sabots prevent you from feeling the cold. I'm not even mentioning the chestnuts and potatoes roasted in the embers, with a little glass of Côte d'Or. I return with great regret to Paris, where the stiff collars, forgotten for months, again begin to get on my nerves." (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, Paris, 1950, p. 142). It was at Essoyes in 1888 that he painted *The Washer Women* (p. 165), with a colour scheme that again calls the eighteenth century to mind. The inclusion of three-year-old Pierre in the painting made it one more testimony to Renoir's family idyll.

On 14 April 1890, Pierre Auguste Renoir officially registered his marriage to Aline Charigot in the mairie of the 9th arrondissement. While he changed apartments and studios many times, Renoir hardly ever moved outside Montmartre. Now he installed his family high on the slope of the hill, in the house at 13 Rue Girardon which was known as the Château des Brouillards. This name preserved the memory of a long-demolished eighteenth-century château on the site of which several houses had been built. Renoir's three-storey house had an attic converted into a studio. Roses and a fruit-tree grew in the garden. But the best thing about the place was the view. From the western-facing window "you could see Mont Valérien and the hills of Meudon, the hills of Argenteuil and Saint-Cloud and the plain of Gennevilliers. From the windows looking north you could see the Saint-Denis valley and the Bois de Montmorency. On a clear day you could make out the basilica of Saint-Denis. We were really up in the sky," Jean Renoir wrote (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 295). It was here, in 1894, that the future film-director was born, the second son of Auguste and Aline Renoir. He was christened in Saint-Pierre, one of the oldest churches in Paris. It stood on the crest of the hill, a twelfth-century remnant of the monastery that once existed here.

In 1850 there were plans to demolish the church, fortunately they were not carried out and at the turn of the twentieth century the building was renovated. For Renoir such things were of great significance – the old Paris always remained one of his strongest loves. At that time the Maquis, a strange mixture of dense vegetation and shanty-town, had still not been cleared from the sides of the hill and Madame Renoir and the children collected snails there. However, as ugly evidence of the onward march of the new which Renoir hated so much, from the late 1870s the great intrusive bulk of the Sacré-Cœur rose higher and higher on the very summit of the hill, almost touching the walls of Saint-Pierre. The 1890s brought Renoir both joy and sorrow. He travelled extensively and painted in Normandy and Brittany. He worked with Cézanne on the Mediterranean coast and visited art museums in Germany, Britain and Spain. At home he was surrounded by friends, old and new. Life in Montmartre at that time was still simple, like in a village. Aline's wholesome country cooking, and her celebrated bouillabaisse in particular, were famous among their circle of friends. They did not arrange parties, rather the house was always open to callers, and the most varied companies would gather there. These no longer, however, included the Impressionists. "At first we were a group," the elderly Renoir told Jean. "We sensed each other's elbows and supported each other. And then, one fine day, there was suddenly no one there!" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 332). Monet, Sisley, Pissarro, even Cézanne, with whom Renoir enjoyed a strong and enduring friendship, were rarely seen in Montmartre. Renoir did maintain

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
The Washer Women, c. 1888.
Watercolour, 21 x 17.1 cm.
The Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore.

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special contacts with Berthe Morisot and her family, so that the female Impressionist's death in 1895 was a great loss for him. "Berthe Morisot," Jean tells us, "made my father a posthumous present in the shape of Ambroise Vollard. She guessed that that strange character was a genius in his own way…" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 336). He came to Renoir himself. "I went to look for Renoir, who was living on Montmartre in an old house called the Château des Brouillards," Vollard related. "In the garden the servant-girl, who looked like a gypsy, did not even ask me to wait, but immediately showed me the passageway in the house from which a young lady emerged, all chubby and good-natured like the townswomen of Louis XV's time in some of the pastels by Perroneau. That was Madame Renoir." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 336-337). Vollard became Renoir's dealer, friend and biographer. The dark-haired "gypsy" in the garden was Gabrielle Renard, a cousin of Aline's, who had been summoned from Essoyes to help in the household.

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Pierre Auguste Renoir,
The Large Bathers, 1884-1887.
Oil on canvas, 117.8 x 170.8 cm.
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

By the time she came, Pierre was already quite big and Jean became her main concern. Montmartre grew used to seeing Gabrielle carrying the younger Renoir boy on her back. Later Gabrielle became one of the elderly Renoir's favourite models. Among the other friends Berthe Morisot "bequeathed" to Renoir was the writer Stéphane Mallarmé. He once addressed a letter to Renoir, then living in the Rue Saint-Georges, in the following way: A celui qui de couleur vit au trente-cinq de la rue du vainqueur du dragon, porte ce pli, facteur ("To the man who lives by his paints at number 35 on the street of the Dragon-Slayer, postman, convey this missive.") (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 390). Surprisingly perhaps, the letter was indeed delivered to Renoir, who had become an inseparable part of Montmartre. The man of letters in the Nabis' circle, Thadée Natanson, publisher of the Symbolist journal *La Revue Blanche*, left us a vivid description of Renoir in 1896: " (…)glittering eyes that contain a glow, and a tenderness at the same time. His agile fingers are constantly plucking and smoothing his grey moustache and beard… He paces back and forth. He sits down, gets up and, having just got up, decides to sit down again, (…) he always finds a way to talk with renewed passion about the art of painting. In passing, he laughs at a joke, amuses himself with an anecdote, points out something funny, gets indignant or starts protesting, then comes back to the artists of the eighteenth century." (*La Revue Blanche*, n° 73, Paris, 15 juin 1896, p. 554). Renoir's health was never strong. Reading through his letters, you continually come across references to bronchitis and pneumonia, which kept him in bed for long periods at a time. A bout of neuralgia at Essoyes in 1888 left him with one side of his face paralysed, and in 1897 he suffered a real misfortune. On a rainy summer's day at Essoyes he fell off a bicycle and broke his right arm. Fortunately, he had already taught himself to paint with his left following a previous fracture and his work was not interrupted. Aline cleaned his palette, washed the brushes and scraped the paint from unsatisfactory parts of

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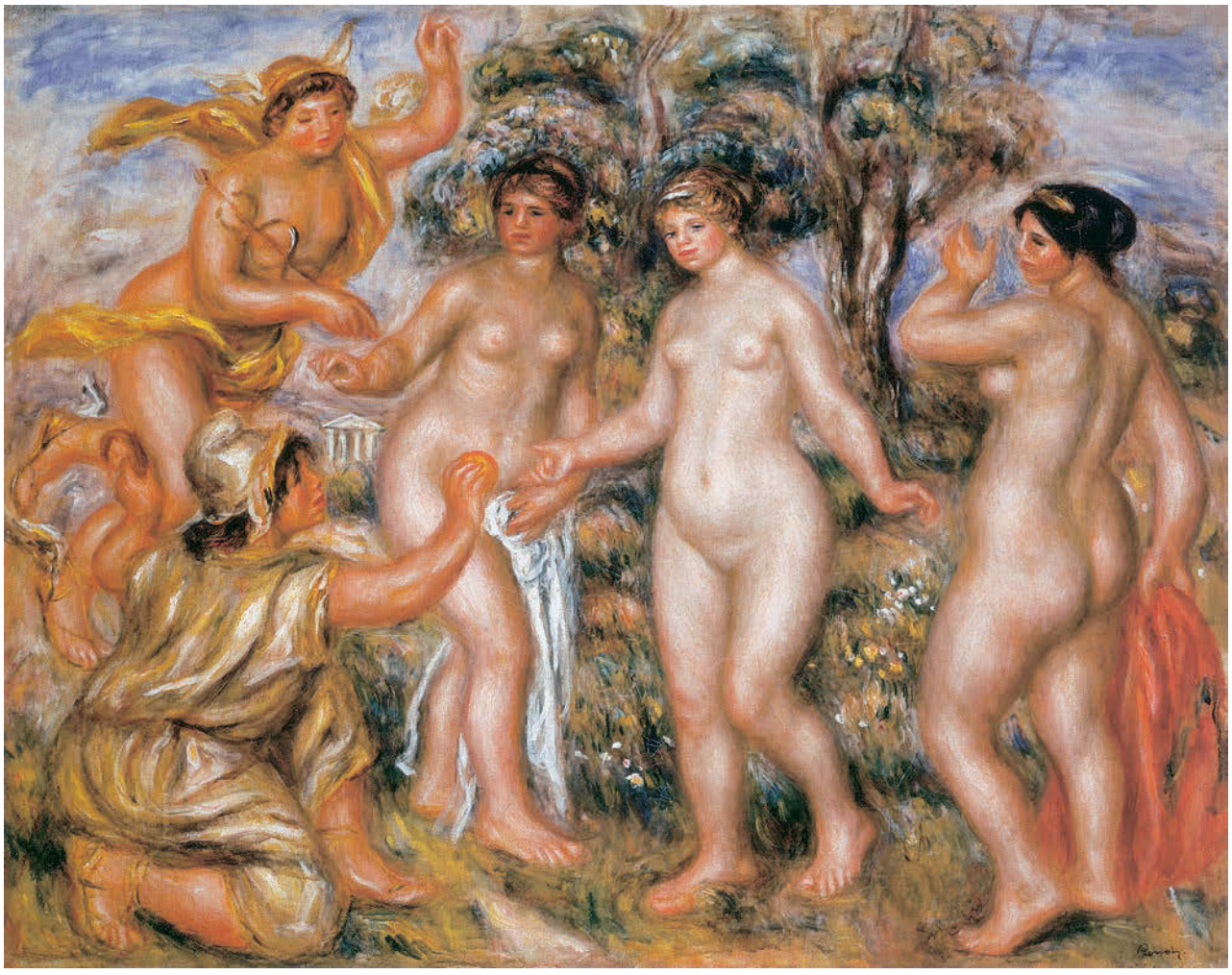

the canvas. Nevertheless, this last fall proved a fateful occurrence. The artist began to be troubled by pain and the Renoirs' family doctor did not console him with his accounts of the incurable kinds of arthritis brought on by such injuries. Renoir was condemned to spend the last twenty years of his life in constant suffering, aware that he was threatened with complete immobility that would mean an end to his work. Yet his fragile body contained a fantastic will to live and a passion to create. He kept working until the very end.

Those last twenty years, most of them belonging to a new century, also brought great joys. In 1901, Aline gave Renoir a third son, Claude, who replaced the growing Jean as a model. Now little "Coco" was put in a red dress and Renoir painted his golden hair, while Jean's eventually had to be cut to prevent boys making fun of him. In 1900 Renoir was made a chevalier of the Legion of Honour, and in 1911 an officer. A whole series of exhibitions were held in Paris, New York and London, turning into a real triumph for Renoir. The artist was especially delighted by a retrospective showing of his painting at the Second Salon d'Automne in 1904, where he was accorded an entire hall. He displayed his work there alongside the young artists – Bonnard, Vuillard, Valtat, Roussel and Matisse – who not only had become his successors in painting, but also surrounded him during the final years of his life. Exhibiting together with them took years off Renoir and provided an unexpected joy. Justifying himself after a fairly unguarded comment made in an interview about the Salon d'Automne, Renoir wrote to Durand-Ruel in the October of 1904: "I agreed because I trusted the organisers of the exhibition. I am delighted at what I did. Everybody's happy. Those whom I managed to see think that the exhibition is most interesting and, what is quite rare, organised with taste. It's a success. What more is there to wish for? I was afraid, looking at the large number of here-today-gone-tomorrow exhibitions. I was wrong – all the better." (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 184). Aline sought to cure Renoir.

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
The Judgment of Paris, c. 1913-1914.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 92.5 cm.
Museum of Art, Hiroshima.

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They tried all the medicinal waters in France. Sometimes there was a deceptive improvement, but it never lasted long. The family could see how Renoir's face was changing, how the disease was twisting his fingers and making him increasingly less mobile. In 1912 the Bernheims, who had joined Durand-Ruel and Vollard as his regular dealers, found a doctor who promised to put the artist back on his feet. A strict regimen and a month of treatment did indeed bring some hope. One fine day, the doctor gathered Renoir's family together so as to demonstrate what had been achieved. The artist was supposed to raise himself out of an armchair and walk around it as they watched, something he had not been able to do for a very long time. Renoir did all that was expected of him, but, before sitting down again, he made an announcement: " I am giving this up. It demands all my will-power and I have nothing left to paint with. When all's said and done (he gave a sly wink), if it's a choice between walking and painting, I prefer to paint." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 493).

In this period the family lived by turns in Paris, on the Boulevard Rochechouart; on the Mediterranean coast; and in little villages in the south of France, trying to find the place with the climate that suited Renoir best. Finally, they came to rest in the village of Cagnes. Renoir told Jean that there was nothing more beautiful in the world than the reeded valley of the little River Cagne. Despite the artist's illness, the house was always full of life. Friends did not shrink from the train journey so as to come and see him. Renoir could be pushed on rails made especially for his chair out into the garden where he painted. Gabrielle posed for him as did other models who became almost members of the family and stayed on to live in the house. They were given nicknames – la Boulangère, la Grand-Louise. The main idea running through the last years of Renoir's work was the creation of a large painting with nude figures, coming close to a wall-painting. As far back as 1887 he had painted *The Large Bathers* (p. 166) in the somewhat austere Ingres-inspired manner of those years. "Right now, when I no longer have arms or legs, I would like to paint large canvases," he told the young artist Albert André, who became a very close friend of the family in those final years. "I am dreaming only of Veronese, of The Marriage at Cana!… How terrible!" (A. André, *op. cit.*, p. 28).

In 1908, at Les Collettes, he painted against the background of the evergreen olive trees his first version of *The Judgment of Paris* (p. 167), a work which he subsequently not only repeated, but also turned into a relief with the help of sculptors. The latter venture arose from his acquaintance with Aristide Maillol, who in 1908 produced a sculptural portrait of Renoir to Vollard's commission. The old artist enjoyed watching Maillol at work and he formed the desire to realise in sculpture what he had already done in painting. Sadly, there was one major obstacle – Renoir could barely use his hands. Vollard brought the young sculptor Richard Guino, a pupil of Maillol, to Renoir and he became the artist's "hands". Following the old man's instructions he first produced a small figure of Venus, then a statue of the same goddess almost two metres tall and a high-relief version of *The Judgment of Paris* (p. 167). There too, in the garden, Renoir painted the last big canvas, which he wanted to make his testament as a painter – the *Bathers* which Renoir's sons presented to the Louvre in 1923. It was the act of painting which kept him alive.

In 1914 the Great War began and the artist's two elder sons went off to the front. This event proved too much for Aline – she died within the year, leaving Renoir alone. Pierre and Jean came back wounded, but life, nonetheless, settled back into an established pattern. Renoir continued to work, but every day it became harder. He died of pneumonia at Les Collettes on 2 December 1919, after managing to finish his last work, a still life with anemones. All his life, he remained the way he had always been, true to himself.

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Nude, 1876.
Oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm.
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

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Alfred Sisley (1839-1899)

"The most reserved, the shyest, the calmest,
and the most modest of the Impressionists, is Sisley"

(L. Venturi)

Alfred Sisley was born in Paris on 30 October 1839 to English parents. His father William Sisley, a native of Manchester, was a businessman who exported artificial flowers to America. Alfred's mother, Felicia Sell, came from an old family of London intellectuals. She brought her son up to love the arts, particularly music, and educated him in good manners. Still, there was no thought of his pursuing fine arts as a career, as yet. When the well-brought up young man reached eighteen years of age his parents sent him to England. They assumed he would study business and the problems of coffee and cotton sales. Alfred himself took the opportunity to become immersed in England's cultural life. He spent five years in England, from 1857 to 1861 and, in the country of Shakespeare, felt himself to be English for the first time. He studied English literature, but was even more interested in England's great master painters. It was most likely in this way – through exposure to the free brushwork of Turner and Constable's landscapes, which resembled preparatory studies – that Sisley sensed he had a vocation for the genre. Returning to Paris in 1862, Sisley was able to get his parents' permission to study painting. At the time his father's business was prospering and Sisley did not have to concern himself with making a living. In October 1862 fate brought him to Charles Gleyre's free studio, where Claude Monet, Pierre Auguste Renoir, and Frédéric Bazille had come to study. They very quickly became inseparable. In spite of Monet's incontestably dominant role, the shy, modest Sisley remained independent, and firm in his convictions. He drew with care and patience, fully determined to quickly attain perfection. "Bazille brought a young man to Gleyre's studio who was just as determined as himself to 'set the house on fire.' It was Sisley," Jean Renoir recounts, recollecting his father's stories. "His father was an English merchant (…) After each session the three friends would go to La Closerie for beer and heated debate. Renoir was the youngest: Sisley and Bazille were two years older than he. Monet eventually came and filled out the group" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 120). Sisley quickly became an indispensable element in their community. He made friends with Pissarro, who had also joined the group, and this friendship would last their whole lives. All the friends felt a particular fondness for Sisley. "Sisley's gift was his gentleness," Renoir's son goes on. "He was a charming human being." Women, in particular, responded to his sincere desire to protect them. But his protectiveness was to lead him into an ordeal of self-sacrifice, and his gentleness would deceive him. A look of recognition, a squeeze of the hand, could move him deeply. "He never could resist a petticoat" – said Renoir – "We would be walking along the street, talking about the rain and the fine weather. Suddenly, Sisley was gone. I would find him back there flirting." "Let's say he had good taste," Jean Renoir continues. "My father remembered a servant at an inn in the Paris suburbs (…) "A fine girl," said Pierre Auguste Renoir. "I painted her myself – she posed like an angel. Sisley wasn't satisfied with just painting her. She was crazy about him" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 131). Renoir painted several portraits of Sisley: he is handsome and elegant, with large, sad eyes. In one of them he is seen with his wife. Jean Renoir also speaks of this portrait. He says

Pierre Auguste Renoir,
Portrait of the Painter Alfred Sisley, 1876.
Oil on canvas, 66.4 x 54.2 cm.
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.

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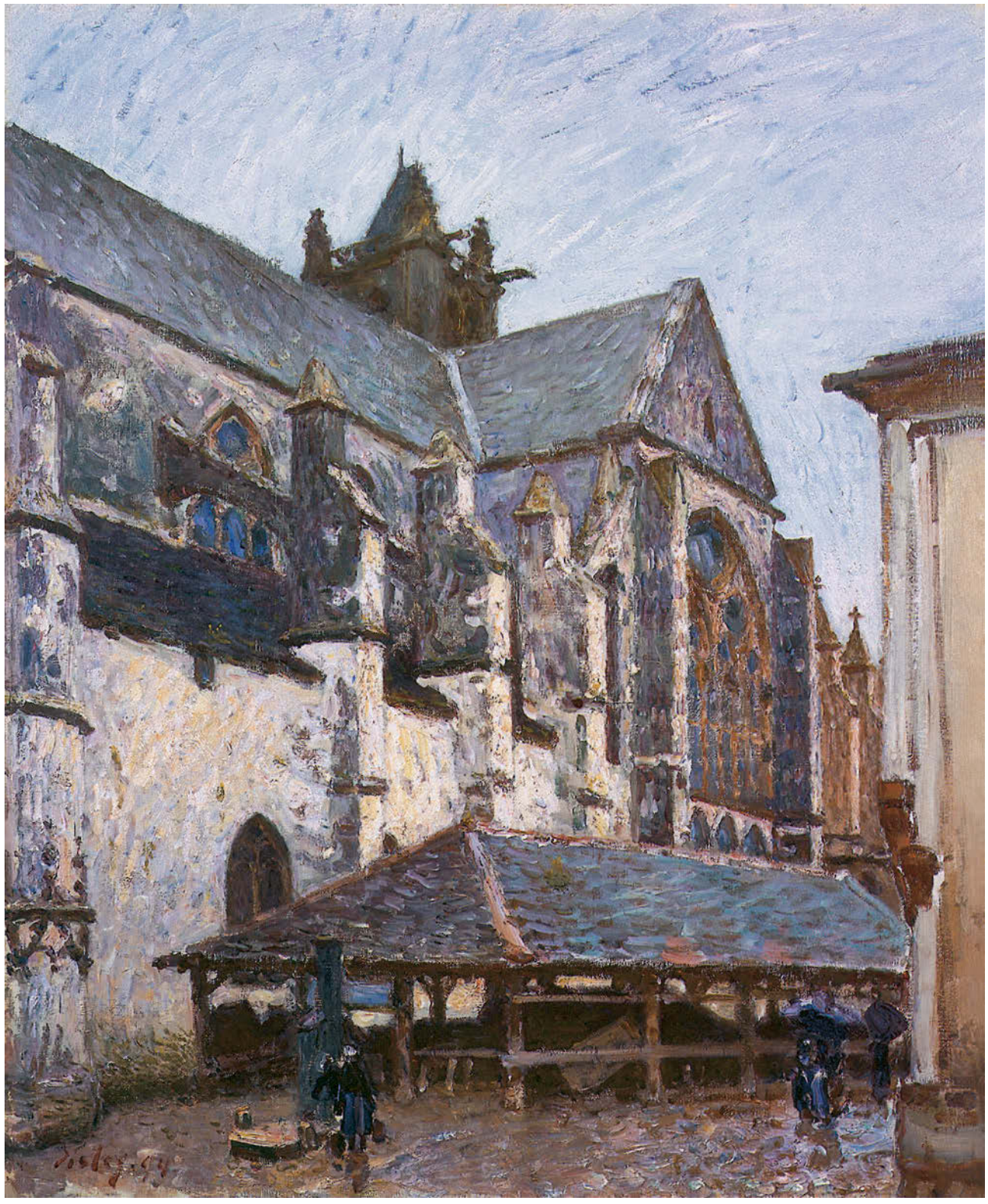

Alfred Sisley,

The Church at Moret in the Rain, 1894.

Oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm.

Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham.

it "gives some notion of Sisley's charming attitude, not only towards his wife, but all women. The expression on Mme Sisley's face, and even of her whole body, says more than anything I could about the sort of cheerful, trusting response evoked by this gallant man's thoughtfulness. Mme Sisley was a model who had posed for my father and for her future husband as well. My father had a great deal of respect for her. 'A deeply gracious woman, very well-mannered. She posed because her family had been ruined, I know not how.' She became ill with a fatal disease: Sisley was remarkable in his devotion, lavishing attention on her, spending all his days by the armchair where she tried to rest" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 131-132). Sisley's wife was named Marie Lescouezec, and he married her in 1866. Renoir painted Sisley's portrait with his wife in the Fontainebleau forest, where they were working in the open air. It was Sisley who had encouraged his friends to give up their

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apprenticeship at Gleyre's studio and go out to paint from nature. He was outraged, far more so than his friends, at Gleyre's arrogant attitude towards landscapes. From the beginning, landscape for Sisley was not just an essential pictorial genre, it was the one and only genre in which he was to work his entire life.

After leaving Gleyre, Sisley often painted together with Monet, Renoir, and Bazille in the environs of Paris. In 1865, at the invitation of Jules Le Coeur, a friend of Renoir's, Sisley and Renoir went to paint in the little village of Marlotte at the edge of Fontainebleau forest. At the same time Monet and Bazille were working in the depths of the forest, at Chailly-en-Biere. These villages were not very far from each other, and the friends often met up, especially at old Mother Anthony's little inn, which can be seen in Renoir's painting. Sisley often modelled for Renoir, though it is not always possible today to identify the figures in the latter's paintings.

Alfred Sisley,
The Church at Moret: Evening, 1894.
Oil on canvas, 101 x 82 cm.
Petit Palais – Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, Paris.

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Sisley and Renoir spent the autumn and winter of 1865 at Marlotte. One of their landscapes from that winter, *Village Road at Marlotte* (Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery) was accepted at the Salon of 1866. Its scenographic composition and dark, brownish colour scheme show that he was still heavily influenced by Barbizon-School painting – the location itself encouraged it.

In Paris Sisley changed address several times. One of his apartments was in the Cité des Fleurs, in Batignolles (*View of Montmartre from the Cité des Fleurs,* Grenoble, Musée de Grenoble). Many Parisian painters based their paintings on Monmartre, from the Romantic artist Georges Michel to the co-founder of the Barbizon School, Théodore Rousseau, who in fact drew his first landscape there. In Sisley's painting Monmartre is seen in the distance, behind a dark green field. There is nothing romantic about it. The painting's colour scheme is still dark. A sad, anxious atmosphere appears here for the first time, as well, which Sisley's painting would always retain. This impression is created by the small, recently planted trees, spindly and bare, and the enormous winter sky, veiled in clouds. From 1870 onward the first characteristics of the style that later would become that of Impressionist painting began to appear in Sisley's painting. *Barges on the Saint Martin Canal* (Winterthur, Oskar Reinhart Foundation) are painted using broken brushstrokes of pure colour or colour mixed with lead white. From this point forward the colour scheme in Sisley's paintings becomes distinctly lighter. This new technique creates an impression of vibrating water, of brightly coloured shimmering on its surface, and of a crisp clarity in the atmosphere. Light, in Sisley's paintings, has been born.

Alfred Sisley,
Autumn, Banks of the Seine near Bougival, 1873.
Oil on canvas, 46.3 x 61.8 cm.
The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal.

Alfred Sisley,
Flood at Port-Marly, 1876.
Oil on canvas, 60 x 81 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Sisley spent the period of the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune on the outskirts of Paris, renting a cottage in the village of Voisins-Louveciennes. Auguste Renoir and his brother Edmond lived not far away, and Renoir and Sisley went painting together in the Marly forest. Sisley's father was ruined during the war, and died soon thereafter: Sisley was left completely without resources. In 1872 Pissarro and Monet introduced him to Paul Durand-Ruel, whom they had met in London. From that point up until the end of his life, the Durand-Ruels bought paintings of Sisley's, although at the time his painting had no following yet, and it was not easy to sell his work. Over the course of the four years he lived in Louveciennes, Sisley painted numerous landscapes of the banks of the Seine. He discovered Argenteuil and the little town of Villeneuve-la-Garenne, which in his work would remain the very image of silence and tranquility – of a world that civilisation and industry had not yet disfigured. He was not, in contrast to Pissarro, searching for prosaic accuracy. His landscapes are always coloured by his emotional attitude towards them. As with Monet, Sisley's bridges are set in the countryside in a completely natural way. A serene blue sky is reflected in the barely stirring surface of the river. In harmony with this, some small, light-coloured houses and the coolness of the greenery

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Alfred Sisley,
Flood at Port-Marly, 1872.
Oil on canvas, 50 x 65 cm.
Private collection.

create the impression of sunlight. In the painting *Village on the Banks of the Seine (Villeneuve-la-Garenne)* (St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum), Sisley has retained the schema of classical construction, with lateral landscape features and a scenic space in the foreground. There are no figures, but one can almost physically sense the painter's presence, standing at the riverbank in the shadows of the trees, his eyes fixed on the opposite bank. From this moment onward Sisley's vision becomes purely Impressionist as he turns the old system of aerial perspective upside-down. Instead of a gradual passage from the warm tones of the foreground towards the cool distance, he paints blindingly blue water in the middle ground with cottages in warm tones and golden light in the background. The sole red patch in the painting is on one of their rooves. Speaking of such works by Sisley, Renoir said that they kindle a desire to take a walk deep inside of them.

Indeed, no matter what his motif was, Sisley always constructed his perspective so as to draw the gaze towards the background of the painting. A path going off in the distance became one of his favourite motifs. In the well-kept, appealing little town of Argenteuil (*Place d'Argenteuil*, Paris, Musée d'Orsay), the viewer's eye follows the small figures of passersby right along to the end of the street. The Sèvres road (*Louveciennes, Sèvres Road,* Paris, Musée d'Orsay), lined with thin young trees, invites the viewer on a melancholy autumn stroll: one wants to slowly go farther and farther out, where the path descends, revealing a view of the surrounding hills. The river, in Sisley's landscapes, is also a route that

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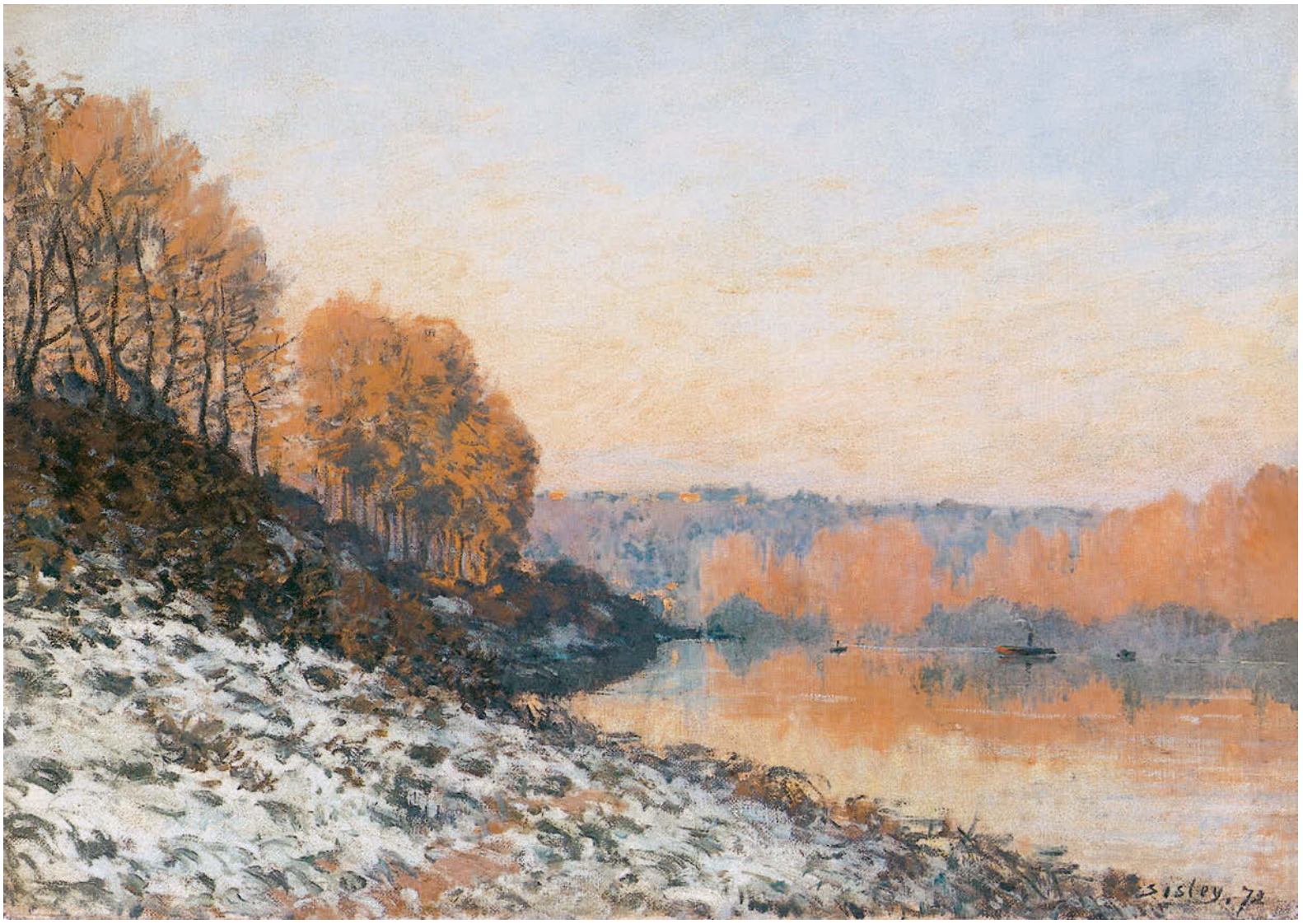

invites one to travel far away. He sees in the Seine, not that joyous animation that Renoir sees, but a sublime calm. The trees are reflected motionlessly in the water, which is smooth as a mirror. The river and the sky are one and the same in this pale azure blue (*The Seine at Bougival,* Paris, Musée d'Orsay). It is precisely in these places that Sisley discovered the effects that changes in colour had on the snow. He painted the snow-covered streets of Louveciennes, with light blue shadows, and the little bright patches of the clothes of passersby. He never grew tired of painting these streets and snow was never without interest for him. It would not have been easy for him to capture that instant when the snow covers the road, the walls, and the trees with its thick, damp blanket (*Snow at Louveciennes,* Paris, Musée d'Orsay). Pink walls are subtly visible through the snowy layers, and the softness of the azure blue in the distance nearly merges with the paleness of the winter sky.

The critics could hardly discern any difference between Sisley's works and those of the other Impressionists, something that always distressed him. But though he wasn't alone in being treated thus, the most sensitive critics had already taken note of his paintings' particular charm before the first Impressionist exhibition. In 1873 Armand Silvestre, in his famous definition of the Impressionist landscape painters, called Sisley "the most harmonious and the most timid" among them (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 284). When Philippe Burty, one of Paris' best critics, wrote about Monet, Pissarro, and Sisley at the same time, Sisley quite rightly deserved the honour of being seen as an integral part of Impressionism, whether it was

Alfred Sisley,
Port-Marly, White Frost, 1872.
Oil on canvas, 46.5 x 65.5 cm.
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille.

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Alfred Sisley,
The Bridge at Villeneuve-la-Garenne, 1872.
Oil on canvas, 49.5 x 65.4 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York.

to be praised or to face the critics: "M. Monet, M. Pissarro, M. Sisley (…) are seeking, with individual aims but also with a common doctrine, to render the general appearance of a landscape in as pure a way as possible," he wrote. "At times the illusion is remarkable. The harmony between the sky, the land, and the greenery is of an exquisite accuracy, but it is often too obvious what has been sacrificed" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 289). Sisley participated in organising the clan's first exhibition and showed five landscapes there; almost no one noticed them. He then presented works at two other exhibitions, after which he provided paintings only for the seventh and next-to-last exhibition. He was never as productive as Pissarro and the number of his landscapes in the exhibitions was distinctly less than those of his friends'. Still, Sisley never disassociated himself from the Impressionists, and remained faithful to the common cause. "Whether we exhibit together or "*à la queue leu leu*" (one after the other), we will always be Impressionists as far as the public is concerned," he wrote to Durand-Ruel in 1882. "I would understand it better if we were debating the issue of whether or not we should exhibit regularly every year. But if we are going to exhibit every year, then we should exhibit together. It is in our interest" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 56).

After the first exhibition Sisley spent several months in England in company with the famous opera singer Jean-Baptiste Faure, who was buying the Impressionists' paintings. In misty England, as strange as it might seem, Sisley's palette became still richer in colour. His English landscapes have the look of one grand

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celebration. Sisley's motifs remained the same as in France. Like Monet he painted regattas with coloured pennants (*Regattas at Molesey, near Hampton Court,* Paris, Musée d'Orsay). The blue water of the Thames is painted with lively, broken brushstrokes, making the red of the boats chopping through it still brighter (*Regattas at Hampton Court,* Zurich, Bührle Foundation). On his return from England, Sisley moved from Louveciennes to Marly-le Roi. The three years he spent there were a period of maturity and intense creative activity. His landscapes became a kind of chronicle of the life of a tranquil little provincial town. He painted the boats advancing slowly along the Seine, the livestock at the drinking trough, and of course the roads. At times he started a landscape directly with the water, which occupies the entire foreground (*Banks of the Seine at Port Marly,* Chicago, private collection). When Sisley worked on the Hoschédé estate at Montgeron he also painted water in the foreground, even if it was only a narrow portion of the pond (*The Hoschédé Garden, Montgeron,* Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts). Around this period Sisley truly became a painter of water. It cast a spell over him, forcing him to scrutinise its changing surface and to study its nuances of colour, as Monet did the meadows at Giverny. The landscapes devoted to the Port-Marly flood are a crowning achievement. The painter plays with space and perspective, in the end finding the only possible solution: the pink house is frozen in a world where the sky merges with the earth, where the reflection barely ripples, and the clouds glide slowly by. Sisley is the only Impressionist whose landscapes

Alfred Sisley,
Banks of the Loing River, 1885.
Oil on canvas, 55.1 x 73.3 cm.
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

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Alfred Sisley,
Snow Effect at Louveciennes, 1874.
Oil on canvas, 54 x 65 cm.
Private collection, London.

do not limit themselves to nature's changing beauty but extend to other realms, sometimes of dreams, sometimes of philosophical reflection (*Flood at Port Marly*, p. 175). His landscapes always arouse a sense of serene admiration for nature, tenderness and, at the same time, a slight sadness. These are not simply paintings where nature is reproduced on the canvas, they are an expression, by means of colour, of a complex range of feelings that nature stirs in people. For Sisley this subtle feeling for nature was connected with the love of music his mother instilled in him. He played piano with Bazille and their mutual friend the musician Edmond Maître, and in later years revealed to a friend how important to him a phrase by Beethoven, which he had first heard in his youth, would be in his work and throughout his life: "This phrase – so merry, so lilting, so lively – it seems as if it has been a part of me ever since I heard it for the first time, it so responds to everything I have always been, deep inside. I sing it continually. I hum it while

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I'm working. It has never deserted me" (F. Daulte, *Sisley. Paysages [Sisley. Landscapes]*, Lausanne, 1961). Sisley produces that impression of total freedom, and even a certain naïveté, in his paintings, thanks not only to an exceptional sensitivity vis-à-vis nature, or to his intuition, but also to his conscious use of pictorial resources. "While the landscape painter must remain in command of his métier," he explained to the critic Adolphe Tavernier, "the handling of the paint, though it can be overdone, must communicate to the viewer the emotion the painter has felt. You see, I'm for differences of handling in the same painting. It's not exactly the conventional viewpoint at the moment, but I think I'm in the right, especially when it comes to rendering an effect of light. Because though the sun may soften certain parts of the landscape, it heightens others, and these effects of light that are manifested almost physically in nature should be rendered physically on the canvas" (F. Daulte, *Sisley. Paysages [Sisley. Landscapes]*, *op. cit.*, p. 26).

After Marly the Sisley family lived in Sèvres for two years. Their situation was very difficult, the paintings weren't selling, and it was only thanks to Georges Charpentier that they were able to make ends meet. In 1879, searching for a way out of his day-to-day difficulties, Sisley renounced Impressionist principles and submitted some paintings to be evaluated by the Salon judges. He was newly disappointed, and it reduced him to despair, but Sisley was not one to complain. In 1880 he and his family moved farther from Paris, along the banks of the Loing River, first to a village and then to the little town of Moret. Actually, he was returning to the places of the group's youth, for Moret was located at the edge of the Fontainebleau forest. "Moret is two hours from Paris," he wrote Claude Monet, "and has plenty of houses for rent at prices going from six cents to a thousand francs. There's a weekly market, a very pretty church, and fairly picturesque views" (F. Daulte, *Sisley. Paysages [Sisley. Landscapes]*, *op. cit.*, p. 36). He remained there the rest of his life, and his canvases are a remarkable poem to this region. It is difficult to imagine how, in spite of truly arduous working conditions, he was capable of painting landscapes that are so free, so poetic, and so peaceful. "I'm working as much as I can, for I need rather a large amount of money next month," he wrote Durand-Ruel during the summer of 1883 (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 58). "The weather has been superb here for a few days," Sisley wrote during the summer of 1885, "but there is a violent wind, which is quite annoying for working" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 59).

Loyalty and steadfastness were central to Sisley's character. He worked in the open air his whole life, which is why he always painted on smaller sized canvases of the type sold pre-prepared in the art supply shops. Never once did he deviate from landscapes painted directly from nature. He never took on hackwork in order to make more money. Although he was continually in need, his letters to Durand-Ruel asking for money were always marked by sensitivity and tact, without the insistent tone of Monet's letters. Moret was a small town and the Sisley family lived in a cottage with a garden, at the foot of the large Gothic cathedral, which became one of the "figures" in his painting. He never tired of painting the Loing River, with its old bridge and its windmill. Fond of simple, peaceful motifs, Sisley found everything he needed for his painting in Moret's environs. The Fontainebleau forest reappeared in his paintings. But now, instead of the old romantic trails that descended into the forest, he painted the bare branches of wind-battered trees, and in this way realised the Impressionist dream of rendering nature in painting, as it is. "It's not all roses in the landscape-painting trade," he wrote a friend in the spring of 1883. "This morning the wind was so strong I had to give up. It's clouding over" (F. Daulte, *Sisley. Paysages*, *op. cit.*, p. 38). Thanks to his formal variety and the direction of his touches of colour over the ploughed earth and the sky, Sisley was truly able to paint, not just the fruit trees at Veneux, but the wind itself (*The Countryside at Véneux*, St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum). The fragile

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branches sway and snap, and clouds come and go at a brisk pace. The sky is another essential element in Sisley's landscapes: without the sky they wouldn't exist. "The sky can't be just a background," he wrote to the critic Tavernier. "On the contrary, it not only contributes to establishing depth with its planes (for the sky has planar depth just like the land), it also establishes movement through its form and its arrangement with respect to the painting's effect, or composition." Even the words in his letter, devoted to the sky, have a poem's resonance: "Is there anything more magnificent, more filled with action, than something that often recurs in summer – I mean a blue sky with fine, ambling clouds? What movement, what tempo, no ? It has the effect a wave does when you are at sea, it elates you, it sweeps you along" (F. Daulte, *Sisley. Paysages [Sisley.Landscapes], op. cit.*, p. 40). Thanks to his handling of the sky and the water's colour, he is able to create the wind on his canvas, though he is only painting the river (*The River Bank at Saint-Mammes*, St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum).

Alfred Sisley,
The Bridge at Moret, 1888.
Oil on canvas, 65 x 92 cm.
Minneapolis Institute of Arts,
Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Sisley died at his home next to the church in Moret on 29 January 1899. He had only survived his wife by one year. A short time before his death the critic Gustave Geoffroy paid him a visit. "As much a literary man as he was an artist," Geoffroy recounted, "he demonstrated and explained things in precise language, and I haven't forgotten the splendour of the trees, the clearings, and the rocks that he elucidated with such poetry" (F. Daulte, *Sisley. Paysages [Sisley. Landscapes]*, *op. cit.*, p. 58). Very few people really knew Sisley,

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and no one living at the time appreciated his painting's true value, with the exception of his Impressionist friends. On 22 January 1899 Pissarro wrote his son: "They say Sisley is very seriously ill. That man is a fine artist, a great artist. It's my opinion that he is a master equal to the greatest there are" (F. Daulte, *Sisley. Paysages [Sisley. Landscapes]*, *op. cit.*, p. 52). Sisley summoned Monet to his bedside and entrusted his children to him: his son Pierre and his daughter Jeanne. "Sisley, Alfred, artistic painter, aged fifty-nine, residing in Moret at number nineteen Rue Montmartre, born in Paris and of English nationality…died today the twenty-ninth of January, at one o'clock in the morning at his residence in the above-noted Moret," such is the entry as it appears in the death registry for the town of Moret-Sur-Loing (F. Daulte, *Sisley. Paysages*, *op. cit.*, p. 60). His life had been sad. He had hopes of being successful, hopes of recognition, but they were dashed by reality. He was born in France, and he loved the country, yet was not even able to obtain French citizenship. But his painting remained. His charm, and even a certain lack of self-assurance, harmoniously complements Monet's boldness: without it the picture of Impressionism would be incomplete. One day, in conversation with the old Impressionist Pissarro, a young painter, Henri Matisse, asked him what it meant to be an Impressionist. Pissarro answered that an Impressionist was one who painted a new painting every time. To the next question – "So, who was the most representative of the Impressionists ?" – Pissarro responded without hesitating: "Alfred Sisley."

Alfred Sisley,
The Bridge at Moret, 1893.
Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 92.5 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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Camille Pissarro (1830-1903)

"As for the rest of my life as a painter, it is linked with the Impressionist group"

At Paul Durand-Ruel's request, Pissarro summarised his own biography in the following way: "Born at St Thomas (Danish Antilles) on 10 July 1830. Came to Paris in 1841 to enrol in the Savary boarding school in Passy. In 1847 I returned to St Thomas, where I began to draw while employed in a business firm. In 1852 I gave up business and left with Mr Fritz Melby, a Danish painter, for Caracas (Venezuela), where I lived until 1855. I returned to St Thomas to work in business. I finally returned to France at the end of 1855 in time to see the Paris Universal Exhibition. Since then I have settled in France, and as for the rest of my life as a painter, it is linked with the Impressionist group" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 24-25). This "rest" of the painter's biography consists of his entire life, which was inseparable from Impressionism. Without this, the story of Pissarro's life would have simply been a commonplace one, typical of all painters, or nearly so.

Camille Pissarro's life began in an exotic world, on the rocky island of St Thomas not far from Puerto Rico. His father, "Pissarro the Jew," owned a hardware store and wished to see his children carry on the business. He sent his son to France to study at a respectable secondary school in Passy, where Camille stayed for six years. This is where he began to draw and the principal of the school encouraged his student's artistic inclinations. When he returned to the island Camille quietly busied himself at the hardware store for five years, but continued to draw. One day, while he was supervising merchandise being loaded at the port and sketching the sailors as they worked, he drew the attention of the painter Melby, who was travelling through St Thomas. He persuaded Camille that he, too, could become a painter. Afterwards, Pissarro recalled he would not have been able to tolerate the quiet life at home for long, though he was well paid as an employee. He said he had wanted to break with his bourgeois life as soon as he could. This is why he abandoned everything, with little reflection, and ran away to Caracas with Melby. He had to overcome a number of difficulties, and managed to do so thanks to youthful energy and enthusiasm. Still, the painter concluded that if he had had the chance to start all over again he would have followed the same path. On his return from Caracas Pissarro resumed his former job, but now his father was no longer opposed to his vocation. Camille drew continually, depicting everything he saw around him. He was fully aware that he would become a professional, and for this reason did an incalculable number of sketches and studies. At the time landscapes were already the centre of his attention, and he strove to learn how to render spacial depth and lay out the composition of a painting. Seeing how serious his intentions were, his father himself sent Pissarro to Paris to study at the Ecole des beaux-arts.

It is not accidental that Pissarro mentions the 1855 Universal Exhibition in his biographical sketch. It set out the different directions possible for him. There were works by Delacroix and landscapes by Daubigny, Jongkind, and Millet. It was impossible to overlook Courbet's "Realist Pavillion". But the attention of the young painter from Saint Thomas was particularly drawn to Corot's painting. He even

Camille Pissarro,
Self-Portrait, 1903.
Oil on canvas, 41.1 x 33.3 cm.
Tate Gallery, London.

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decided to go and see Corot, and ask his permission to become his student. Corot didn't accept students, but he agreed to give Pissarro advice. Monet later remembered that in his youth Pissarro worked in Corot's style. Since the model was excellent Monet didn't disapprove of his friend and, on the contrary, followed his example. Nevertheless, when the Salon accepted Pissarro's painting in 1859, its author appeared in the catalogue as a student of Antoine Melby's. Elder brother of Fritz Melby, Antoine was at the time known principally as a painter of seascapes. He had gone to a good school in Düsseldorf, mastered history and genre painting, and sold his works in various countries with success. His connection with Melby played no insignificant part in Pissarro's professional pictorial training. Later, in 1864, Pissarro signed his paintings "Student of Melby and Corot." The advice of both these masters greatly helped him in his future as a painter.

In 1859 Pissarro's parents moved to Paris as well. His mother's personal maid was a young peasant from Burgundy, Julie Velay. Camille fell in love with her, but his father refused to recognise their union and withdrew his son's monthly allowance. This was the start of the financial difficulties that were to continue to the end of Pissarro's life. Camille and Julie were married in 1870, in England, and she remained a loyal companion throughout the painter's difficult life.

After he moved to Paris, Pissarro apparently tried to study at different studios connected to the Ecole des beaux-arts, but soon became disappointed, and preferred to attend the Académie Suisse. What attracted the young people there was the freedom. For a modest sum Pissarro could draw from the live model, without being worried about a teacher's demands. It was at the Académie Suisse that he met Claude Monet and Paul Cézanne. Pissarro never took lessons at Gleyre's. Bazille, who had met him one day at Edouard Manet's, brought him to the *Closerie des Lilas*, where they all liked to meet. He was six years older than the future Impressionists and two years older than Edouard Manet. His young friends soon nicknamed him "*Père* [Old Man] *Pissarro*". He was impassioned, intelligent, and kind, and indeed became a sort of "father" to the Impressionists. As he appears in his *Self-Portrait* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) – in his painting smock, against a background of studies hanging on the wall – Pissarro is forty-three years old and, with his spreading beard and serious, direct gaze, he looked very much the patriarch. "Born in the Antilles, he expressed himself slowly, with a slightly lilting accent," recounted Renoir to his son Jean. "He dressed sloppily, but chose his words with great care. He would become the theoretician of the new school" (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 122). Pissarro became a regular of the meetings at Café Guerbois, respected and liked by everyone there. The first of the critics to speak of Pissarro was Zola, in 1866: "M. Pissarro is unknown, and doubtless no one will mention him," he wrote. "Be informed that no one likes you here, that they feel your painting is too bare, too dark (…) An austere, solemn way of painting, an extreme concern for truth and justice, a fierce, intense will. You are enormously awkward, sir – you are an artist I like" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 25). The landscape *Banks of the Marne in Winter* (Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago) was accepted by the Salon in 1866. Pissarro had chosen a strange motif: a dark hill against the background of a cloudy, gloomy sky, an empty field, and an isolated farm. Zola, friend and defender of Edouard Manet, held a very favourable opinion of the artist and had brilliantly described his painting's individuality. That same year Pissarro moved to the small town of Pontoise. Daubigny had described to him the beauties of the countryside on the banks of the l'Oise River, and in addition his wife Julie Velay's parents lived in Pontoise. In the end, he found places in the natural landscape there which corresponded with his own character. Later he would paint many remarkable canvases in the vicinity of Pontiose. But landscape

Camille Pissarro,
Rue de l'Epicerie, Rouen
(*Effect of Sunlight*), 1898.
Oil on canvas, 81.3 x 65.1 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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painters are always prey to a degree of instability. Pissarro was no different and felt the need to vary his locations, always searching for a landscape where he could fully express himself. In 1868 he settled down very close to Paris, in Louveciennes, where Sisley and Renoir's relatives lived. His house was on the road from Versailles to Saint-Germain. He liked this region, as did the other future Impressionists, with the meandering course of the Seine, its islands, and the villages of Bougival, Marly, and Argenteuil. And like the others he worked enthusiastically in the open air, and his colour range gradually lost the dark, severe character Zola had noted, gradually becoming purer and lighter. As a Danish national he was not drafted during the Franco-Prussian war, and when the Prussian army drew close to Louveciennes, Pissarro fled to Brittany with his family to his friend Piette's farm. They left hurriedly, and he wasn't able to take his paintings with him. The works at Louveciennes included not just his own, but canvases Monet had stored

Camille Pissarro,

The Versailles Road at Louveciennes, 1870.

Oil on canvas, 100.5 x 81 cm.

Stiftung Sammlung E.G. Bührle, Zürich.

Camille Pissarro,

A Road in Louveciennes, 1872.

Oil on canvas, 60 x 73.5 cm.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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with him, as well. The Prussian soldiers who occupied Pissarro's house destroyed almost 150 of these paintings: they threw them over the muddy paths of the garden, soggy with rain, to make it easier for them to come and go. During this time Pissarro was in London, where his cousin lived and where his mother had gone, though it was not at all easy to leave the country with its crowds of people seized with panic and hurrying to cross the Channel. He met with Claude Monet and the art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel. But he had only one wish, to return to France. The critic Théodore Duret told him in his letters of the looting of Paris during the Commune, and of the terror and despair that reigned in the city, saying he had only one dream, to escape to London as well. To this Pissarro replied: "I won't stay here. It is only abroad that one can feel how fine, how great and hospitable France is. What a difference here! One is greeted only with contempt, indifference, and even coarseness: among colleagues there is the most selfish jealousy and mistrust (…) Except Durand-Ruel, who bought two small paintings from me, my painting isn't getting anywhere, not at all, and this bothers me somewhat wherever I go (…) I may be back at Louveciennes before long. I lost everything there, there are only about forty paintings left out of 1500. What on earth did they do with all of them? (…) warriors !" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 27).

On his return to France Pissarro moved back to Pontoise, farther from Paris. The region was already populated with artists, and he had remarkable neighbours: Daumier's house was just near Pontoise, in Valmondois, and Daubigny lived in the village of Auvers, frequently visited by his close friend Corot. Pissarro had boundless respect for all of them. Another remarkable person lived in Auvers, Dr. Paul-Ferdinand Gachet, who treated painters, went to their favourite cafés, and bought their paintings. In addition, during the 1870s a man of thirty from the south of France arrived there, Paul Cézanne. He settled in Auvers and began to paint in the open air together with Pissarro. One of Pissarro's admirable qualities was his human warmth. He was ready to lend support to anyone in need of help. He was generous in his warmth towards Cézanne, who felt at home with Pissarro's family and was in no hurry to leave Pontoise. When Pissarro was in Paris Cézanne and his oldest son Lucien wrote to him with news of the family in Pontoise. Pissarro taught Cézanne to lighten his palette, and only to paint with the three primary colours and their nearest derivative colours. Pissarro also had a teacher's eye, and knew how to evaluate talent in others. He wrote to Duret from Pontoise, telling of Paul Cézanne's "very strange studies, uniquely visualised" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.* vol. 1, p. 37), and told him that this young painter from Provençe had surpassed all his expectations: his paintings were amazingly powerful and energetic. He said that if Cézanne stayed on at Auvers for some time longer, where he intended to settle, his work would astonish those painters who had so hastily criticised him. Later, Cézanne said Pissarro was like a father to him, and more – like a benevolent God. Beginning in 1879 another habitual guest of the Pissarro family's was Paul Gaugin, then still only an amateur painter and collector. Gaugin also never forgot what knowing Pissarro had done for him and, a few months before his death, wrote in one of his letters: "He was one of my masters, and I would never repudiate him" (J.-P. Crespelle, *Guide de la France Impressionniste*, Paris, 1991, p. 65). In the environs of Pontoise and Auvers Pissarro painted meadows and ploughed fields without end – simple, unpretentious motifs, most often in connection with peasants labouring. He himself said that he liked to represent nature "fully naked." The year of the first Impressionist exhibition he was essentially painting in only a single tonality, his work was not yet completely free of Corot's influence. Pissarro painted *The Ploughed Field* (Moscow, The Pushkin State

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Museum of Fine Arts), in pink-brown tones, to which he added only occasional green tones. His composition is inspired by Daubigny, who also painted his landscapes from a boat, in planes parallel to the horizontal edge of the canvas. This is how Pissarro also constructed the landscape, probably painted at the start of the 1870s, at Louveciennes (*Landscape, Louveciennes,* Paris, Musée d'Orsay) – it was previously believed to have been done in the environs of Pontoise. Here the parallel planes reinforce the rhythm of the trees, which stand equidistant from each other and parallel to the lower edge of the canvas. The colour range is still rather dark. One thinks back to Zola saying that the public would not like this artist's painting. And indeed this is not the poetry of rural landscape, or an idyllic nature far from urban civilisation. Pissarro paints people's monotonous, day-to-day lives amidst a prosaic, familiar nature. In another landscape, *The Wash House at Bougival* (previously *The Wash House at Pontiose*, Paris, Musée d'Orsay), in addition to the women doing their washing, there is a still more prosaic detail: a little factory

Camille Pissarro,
L'Ile Lacroix, Rouen, Effect of Fog, 1900.
Oil on canvas, 46.4 x 55.6 cm.
John G. Johnson Collection,
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

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Camille Pissarro,
The Pond at Montfoucault, 1875.
Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 92.5 cm.
The Barber Institute of Fine Arts,
Birmingham.

with a smoking chimney, rising out of the ground on this picturesque bank of the Seine. Even earlier, in 1869 or 1870, in *Landscape in the Vicinity of Louveciennes, Autumn* (Malibu, The J. Paul Getty Museum), Pissarro had painted backyards and kitchen gardens, instead of poetic paths and the mirror of the water. One of Pissarro's best landscapes appeared at the first exhibition in Nadar's studio in 1874: *Hoarfrost* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), in which the motif is completely devoid of any charm whatever. He painted a gentle, even slope, with little twisted trees and the figure of a peasant bending under the weight of a bundle of firewood. Still, it is here that Pissarro's special poetry reveals itself. The golden colour range, which joins the earth and the sky, gives the impression of gentle sunlight and the whitish veil of the morning frost. For his landscape motif in this painting, before Monet and Sisley, Pissarro chose a scene in nature that was about to change the very next moment. The shadows of the poplars cross the horizontal planes of the landscape at a diagonal. The trees themselves are not included in the painting, they are external to the picture. This type of composition recalls Edouard Manet's constructions in his paintings, where the viewer seems to be included within the space of the pictorial work. Afterwards, Pissarro would more and more frequently do canvases where the emphasis was on rendering atmospheric conditions; this was particularly so in his landscapes of snow (*Rabbit Warren at Pontoise, Snow*, Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago).

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Nevertheless, around the time of the first exhibition Pissarro had already found his own vision of nature, which made him distinct from his landscape-painter friends. In 1873, with remarkable insight, the critic Armand Silvestre wrote: "At first glance one has trouble distinguishing M. Monet's painting from M. Sisley's, and the latter's style from that of M. Pissarro." (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 284). This was, in fact, the impression of the critics. Even in 1877, when viewers had accustomed themselves to distinguishing the Impressionist painters, Philippe Burty wrote that they all had the same flaw: "Their landscapes, which upon scrutiny cannot be confused with one another, have one unpardonable flaw for us: they reduce trees to the state of incorporeal phantoms, and these trunks and branches, which have their beauty the same as the human body and its limbs, are left with the unreasonable stiffness of telegraph poles and shapeless twigs" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 292). But Silvestre had already been aware of each one's individuality before the first exhibition. For him Pissarro was "the most authentic and the most naïve" among them (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 284). In Pissarro's painting objects do not as a rule dissolve into the surrounding air and become shimmers of colour. On the contrary, in *L'Hermitage Hillside, Pontoise* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), the houses built of rough stone have a palpable realism. In the landscape *Climbing Path at L'Hermitage* (New York, Brooklyn Museum), the tiered cottages on the slope of the hill appear, with their sharp definition and geometric shapes, to prefigure the cubism of the future. In the famous *The Red Rooves, Village*

Camille Pissarro,
The Donkey Ride at La Roche-Guyon,
1864-1865.
Oil on canvas, 35 x 51.7 cm.
Private collection, London.

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Spot, Winter Effect (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), the shadows on the tree trunks and the volumetric clarity of the red-roofed houses almost create a relief effect on the canvas.

Pissarro was convinced of the need for his group of friends to carve out an independent niche. Among the future Impressionists he was one of the most courageous. "You are right, my friend, we are beginning to have an impact," he wrote to Théodore Duret in February 1873, "we are being strongly challenged by some of the established masters, but should these differences of opinion come as any surprise, when one arrives, uninvited, and plants one's modest flag in the middle of the fracas? (…) We hope to forge ahead without concern for the opinions of others" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 36). In 1874 Pissarro took an active part in organising their first exhibition. During discussions over its organisation he insisted on the need for creating a cooperative. As an example he proposed the bylaws of the bakers' union, which he had learned of in Pontoise. He also proposed a system in which each of the painters would be well positioned when the time came to hang the paintings. To avoid conflicts Pissarro thought it necessary to determine by lot where each painting would be hung. But all these proposals were rejected: they seemed too radical to the other painters.

Pissarro's ideas during the discussions about the exhibition emerged from his continuing interest in the social aspects of life. Pissarro remained poor in spite of relentless, determined work, and in his situation he felt himself the equal of the peasants he saw working hard in Pointoise and other villages nearby.

Camille Pissarro,
The Stagecoach on the Road from Ennery to l'Hermitage, Pontoise, 1877.
Oil on canvas, 46.5 x 55 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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This also goes far to explain why Pissarro was the only one among the group of Impressionists to inherit Millet's rural motifs. Peasants appear in his landscapes at work and at rest. In 1873 the critic Théodore Duret, a great friend of Pissarro's, wrote the painter that he had bought his landscape with three donkeys and a little shepherdess. The critic said it made no difference to him how the work was painted, with a light or dark palette, because all that made no real difference: in terms of the intensity of feeling, this landscape was as wonderful as a painting by Millet. The comparison with Millet was no accident: Pissarro had at one point seriously intended to take up genre painting. In 1874 he wrote Théodore Duret that he was going to leave the forest, where he had been staying an entire month, and return to Pontoise. He said he had already started to depict people and animals, and had done a few genre paintings. But he felt timid and uncomfortable in this style. Since his youth he had worked at nurturing the landscape painter within him, and had some success in this: it was also the genre to which all his friends were devoting themselves. For a certain time Pissarro was very interested in the social theories of the anarchists, but for him the truth to be found in art outweighed all others. Much later, in 1892, he wrote that he had read *Bread and Freedom* by the Russian anarchist Kropotkin. While he understood that the idea was utopian, this did not make the dream any less wonderful. Since there had in fact been examples of utopias becoming realities, there was nothing to prevent one believing that someday this utopia would be achieved as well, provided humanity

Camille Pissarro,

The Seine and the Louvre, 1903.

Oil on canvas, 46 x 55 cm.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Camille Pissarro,

Lordship Lane Station, Dulwich, 1871.

Oil on canvas, 44.5 x 72.5 cm.

Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery, London.

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Camille Pissarro,
The Banks of the Marne at Chennevières,
1864-1865.
Oil on canvas, 91.5 x 145.5 cm.
National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh.

did not first collapse into utter barbarity. But Pissarro found Kropotkin's thoughts on art unacceptable. Kropotkin believed one had to live the way peasants lived in order to understand them. Pissarro said one had to have a passion for one's subject. And for this, it did not help to become a peasant: first and foremost one had to be an artist.

In all, Pissarro showed several dozen of his landscapes at every Impressionist exhibition until the eighth and last, in 1886. He was the only one to take part in all of their group exhibitions, and never again to submit his works to the Salon. He painted flowering fields and ploughed fields, the bare branches of trees in winter, apple trees blossoming impulsively, and light blue shadows and pink light on the snow. *The Road to Ennery near Pontoise* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) inevitably brings to mind Sylvestre's reference to Pissarro's "naïvete." Amidst the gently sloping, seldom varying hills that he never tired of painting, little figures appear on the country paths: two travellers on horse carts, a peasant with a sack on his shoulders, and two women wearing hats. It is a world that is real and childlike at the same time, as in the works of naïve painters.

Pissarro dearly loved Paris, and visited when he could, but his poverty and his work with rural landscapes kept the family in the provinces. They had six children, and later lost one of their daughters. Country life was far less expensive and the painter's wife made things somewhat easier by growing vegetables and raising hens and rabbits. Despite his indigence, Pissarro remained the same with his friends. Life had done its best to break him, yet he continued to be the heart and soul of the clan, "Old Man Pissarro", and he was always ready to offer help. When he received a "sad and kind" letter from Monet in Pontoise, lamenting the trouble he was

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having selling his paintings, Pissarro replied that, although "my patch of land is small and my cupboard is bare," he would be happy to let Monet know if he learned of any good opportunities. In 1882 the Pissarro family moved to the small village of Osny, about three miles from Pontoise, where they could live even more simply. The painter believed his financial situation was somewhat stable now. "I'm not being 'showered with gold,' as the romantics say," he wrote to Duret. "I'm enjoying the fruits of modest, but consistent sales" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 62). In September he even decided to make a journey through the Aube region and the Côte d'Or, hoping to find new motifs: "Old towers, churches, and old houses with a romantic air about them – these would be extremely interesting to do with our fine modern eye" he wrote (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 62). In 1884 Pissarro again moved a bit farther north to Eragny on the Epte River, this same little river on whose banks sat Claude Monet's Giverny. He settled into a very large but simple farmhouse right on the river bank, facing the village of Bazincourt. The meadows and gently sloping hills of Eragny served as Pissarro's "studio", as did the meadows of Giverny for Claude Monet. Like all the Impressionists Pissarro worked devotedly, in the rain as well as on days with frost, waiting long hours for the atmospheric phenomenon he needed. Catastrophic weather was often a source of delight for the painter. "I won't have the chance to finish my two P [paintings]," he wrote to Durand-Ruel, "I'm not seeing the hoarfrost effects: on the other hand I've had some superb flooding, but it's gone so fast !" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 39).

Occasionally Pissarro travelled to London, Brussels, or Rouen. This very lively city, with its port, appealed to him. He painted Rouen for the first time in 1883, then returned there several times in 1896. Settled in the Hotel D'Angleterre, he told his son that the view from his window, on the mezzanine, was

Camille Pissarro,
Le Carrefour, Pontoise, 1872.
Oil on canvas, 55 x 94 cm.
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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magnificent. In February 1896 he became particularly interested in Boieldieu Bridge, or the Great Bridge. "What particularly interests me is a motif with the railroad bridge in wet weather, and a great deal of traffic: vehicles, pedestrians, dock workers, ships, smoke, and mist in the distance – very animated and full of action," he wrote. "I wanted to render the liveliness of this beehive of activity that is Rouen on the docks." (*L'Impressionnisme et lePaysage Français [Impressionism and the French Landscape], op. cit.*, p. 208). In this letter he is, in fact, outlining a program for urban landscapes that he meant to implement in his painting point for point during the last years of his life. The best view of the Great Bridge was from the windows of the Hotel d'Angleterre, and Pissarro painted it enthusiastically (*The Great Bridge, Rouen,* Pittsburgh, Carnegie Institute, Museum of Art). "I have a motif (…) from my window, the new neighbourhood of Saint-Sever directly across from here, with the hideous Orléans station, sparkling brand-new, and a heap of chimneys, huge ones and tiny ones, with their plumes of smoke." He described this landscape to Lucien as it appeared on his canvas. "In the foreground, ships and water: to the left of the station is the working-class district, which runs the length of the docks up to the railroad bridge, Boieldieu Bridge. It's morning, with a delicate, hazy sun." One has the impression that a winter's day could be recreated in paint from these notes, down to its very atmosphere. "It's as lovely as Venice (…), it has an extraordinary character (…). It's art – and I'm seeing it through my own sensations. There isn't only this motif, there are wonders right and left." (*L'Impressionnisme et le Paysage Français [Impressionism and the French Landscape]*, *op. cit.*, p. 208).

Camille Pissarro,
Boulevard Montmartre in Paris, 1897.
Oil on canvas, 74 x 92.8 cm.
The State Hermitage Museum,
St Petersburg.

No matter what Pissarro's attitude might be towards his motif, it remained that of an Impressionist and the role of weather was in no way least important for him. "The Sun! It's a rare delicacy at the moment. The canvases I've begun with this effect are back in my crate waiting for it to clear up, but the effects of rain never stop" he wrote from Rouen, "there are even times when I have to keep my windows closed!" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 41). For an Impressionist painter, painting a landscape from a window was the same as working in the open air.

In 1885 Pissarro met Seurat and Signac. For a short interval he and his son Lucien adhered to their "pointillist", "neo-Impressionist style," and both began to paint using small, juxtaposed touches of colour. In the beginning Pissarro was captivated by the way Seurat tackled the lessons of classical art and the science of colour. Pissarro was a man of many enthusiasms, and remained young all his life because of his temperament. He painted a whole series of Pointillist works in the manner of Seurat and Signac, but in 1888 he began to caution Signac about the dangers of following "Pointillism" blindly. He advised him to make use of science, which belonged to everyone, but to preserve his artist's sensibility. He knew it would be impossible to change Seurat's view of the correctness of his new system of painting, and that the issues Seurat was raising

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would assuredly be dealt with. Still, "Old Pissarro" had too much respect for Signac not to try to warn him. Pissarro was convinced that creativity was superior to theory. On that basis he came to the conclusion that "Pointillism" wasn't right for him, since the impression it produced had a lifeless monotony to it.

During the 1890s Pissarro was forced to interrupt his work in the countryside: due to an eye disease he could no longer work in the open air. In Paris he made a great many prints and painted fans – this brought in a bit of money. At the end of the century there was a craze for Japanese style – "*le japonisme*", which was one of the decorative elements of "Art Nouveau" ornamentation. In 1893 all of Paris was swooning over the exhibition by the Japanese Painter Hiroshige. Still, Pissarro remained an Impressionist in his fan paintings. He described to his son Lucien one of these fans which, he said, had produced something quite unexepected: a red setting sun, like an aurora borealis, a trail of pearl-grey mist, and, in this mist, the blurry contours of cows. He drew these fans on Japanese paper, and the influence of the Japanese masters is evident.

In the 1890s Pissarro began to paint the Parisian landscapes that were to assure his reputation as an urban landscape painter. He found a way to reconcile his preference for open-air painting with his doctors' prohibitions: he would rent a room somewhere, on as high a floor as possible, preferably an attic, from which a magnificent panorama of Paris could be seen – "I want to sleep near the stars, like the old astrologers /" wrote Charles Baudelaire, "while I'm chastely writing my pastoral verse / From high up in my attic, my chin cupped in my hands… / I'll see them talking and singing in the workshop." (Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, "*Tableaux Parisiens, 86, Paysage*" *[Flowers of Evil, "Parisian Tableaux, 86, Landscape"]* Paris, 2002, p. 135).

Camille Pissarro,
Place du Théâtre français, *Spring*, 1898.
Oil on canvas, 65.5 x 81.5 cm.
The State Hermitage Museum,
St Petersburg.

"*Je veux, pour composer chastement mes églogues, / Coucher auprès du ciel, comme les astrologues / Les deux mains au menton, du haut de ma mansarde…, / Je verrai l'atelier qui chante et qui bavarde;….*" Clearly it was impossible to discern details, but the painter could detect the pulse of Paris in its continuously animated streets. He painted close to the window, in the same manner as in Rouen or the open air of the countryside. He began and completed his landscape in just one session, like in the outdoors, and all the while his eyes were protected from exposure to the wind. He had previously painted isolated urban views on occasion: *Boulevard Rochechouart* in 1878, and a snowy effect in *The Outer Boulevards*, also from 1878. Now he painted Rue Saint-Lazare. Trains starting out from Eragny arrived at Saint-Lazare station, and Pissarro usually entered the city by this route. In 1893 he settled in to the Hotel Garnier on Rue Saint-Lazare. He painted four views of this street from the hotel window that were the start of his large series of Parisian landscapes. Next came an opportunity of a sort he could only have dreamt of: "I'm leaving

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again on the tenth of the month, for Paris again, this time to do a series there of the Boulevard des Italiens," he wrote to his son from Eragny in February 1897. "I've decided on a spacious room at the Grand Hotel de Russie, One Rue Drouot, from where I can see the whole succession of boulevards almost all the way to Porte Saint-Denis, or as far as Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, anyway" (*L'Impressionnisme et le Paysage Français [Impressionism and the French Landscape], op. cit.*, p. 204). From this window he began to paint the long ribbon of broad boulevards that follow one upon another, in different weather, in different situations, and at different times of the day. He wanted to see the crowds on holiday from above, which would introduce a new rhythm and new colour into the landscape. "Here I am, all settled in and covering some large canvases," he wrote a few days later. "I'm going to try to prepare one or two in order to do the crowds on the day of Mardi Gras. I don't know yet what will happen: I truly hope the streamers don't bother me" (*L'Impressionnisme et le Paysage Français [Impressionism and the French Landscape], op. cit.*, p. 204). Pissarro would prepare a canvas with the perspective of the boulevard, then paint it during the moment he wished to set down on this canvas. He painted a total of fifteen variations using Boulevard Montmartre. Certain canvases were of the everyday boulevard, on workdays, with the vehicles coming and going, while on the sidewalks the dark stream of unhurried pedestrians flowed by (*Boulevard Montmartre. Sun in the Afternoon,* St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum). In others, this same boulevard is flooded with a stream of bright colours: it is the Carnival celebration going by (*Boulevard Montmartre, Mardi-Gras*, Los Angeles, Armand Hammer Collection). "I have a large number of things in progress. On Mardi-Gras I did the boulevards with the crowds and the Boeuf-Gras parade, with the sun's effects on the streamers and the trees, and the crowds in the shadow" (*L'Impressionnisme et le Paysage Français [Impressionism and the French Landscape], op. cit.*, p. 204).

In this series Pissarro continued and elaborated on the image of the new Paris of their time, which Monet had begun in his *Boulevard des Capucines* (Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts). He switched hotels and switched apartments, but his motif always remained Haussmann's Paris. "I forgot to inform you that I have found a room in the Grand Hotel du Louvre with a superb view of the Avenue de L'Opéra and the corner of the Place du Palais Royal! Very nice to do!" he wrote in 1897. "It may not be very aesthetically pleasing, but I am delighted to be able to try and do the smaller streets of Paris which are commonly thought of as ugly, but which are so silvery, so luminous and so lively. It's entirely different from the boulevards. They're completely modern" (*L'Impressionnisme et le Paysage Français [Impressionism and the French Landscape], op. cit.*, p. 206). He continued to work according to the same method, preparing the landscape's composition in advance. "Here I am, I moved in yesterday," he continued in the letter to his son. "I have two large rooms and nice large windows from which I can see the Avenue de L'Opéra. The motif is very fine, very painterly. I have already begun two canvases" (*L'Impressionnisme et le Paysage Français [Impressionism and the French Landscape], op. cit.*, p. 206). The point of view looking down on the city permitted Pissarro to use new composition methods, which the Impressionists had learned from the model of Japanese prints. If he painted a street that went on for a distance, the perspective remained a classical, linear one. If he was looking out from his attic at the Théâtre Français, it would spread out over the canvas on one plane only, right to its upper edge, leaving no space for the sky. The square is sprinkled with little figures of men and women, as is sometimes the case in Peter Brueghel's compositions. Though,

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in a Pissarro, these figures are most often done with two or three touches of paint, as if carelessly applied to the canvas, each of them precisely renders the characteristic movement of a pedestrian (*Place du Théâtre Français, Paris*, Los Angeles, County Museum of Art). His pedestrians swarm through the square and its vicinity, running to cross the streets, mounting the public transports. From high above it Pissarro reproduced the city's circulation and rhythm with the same sensitivity Monet demonstrated for capturing atmospheric changes. After Monet's series of "*Stations*" and "*Rouen Cathedrals*", Pissarro's urban series finally appeared in the exhibitions: twelve "*Alleys*" and seven or eight "*Boulevards*." At the dawn of the twentieth century Pissarro painted the Tuileries Gardens, from an attic as always. In one of these canvases, behind the garden and the Seine, the Gare d'Orsay station can be seen, still under construction. He was not satisfied, himself, with the works of this period. He wrote Claude Monet that those who were praising his landscapes of the Tuileries Gardens were being too indulgent towards him: "I'm not satisfied with it. I haven't worked much. I'm battling old age" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 103). He was pleased to have found a good workplace, near the Pont-Neuf, with a magnificent view. In 1901 Pissarro worked in Dieppe. In this old maritime city he saw the natural context he needed: the lively activity of the colourful crowd at a fair around the huge Gothic cathedral (*The Fair at Dieppe. Sunshine, Morning*, St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum). In July 1903 he stayed at the Hotel Saint-Siméon in Normandy, the previous site of a farm which had been a meeting place for Courbet, Daubigny, Jongkind, Boudin, and Monet. The entrancing little city of Honfleur disappointed Pissarro: the elegant villas that had been constructed there, along with the too-manicured, well-kept streets, had spoiled the landscape. Le Havre, on the other hand,

Camille Pissarro,
Place du Théâtre français, Paris, Rain Effect, 1898.
Oil on canvas, 73.6 x 91.4 cm.
Minneapolis Institute of Fine Arts, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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inspired him. The old Impressionist, whom life had taught wisdom, was no longer interested in the details of the landscape. He sought to penetrate to what was essential, which is what he had aspired to throughout his life as a painter. “I only see patches of colour now,” he said. “When I begin a painting, the first thing I try to get down is the *accord*. Between the sky, and the land and this water, there is necessarily a relationship of *accord*, and that is the great problem in painting (…) The great problem to resolve is to bring everything, even the smallest details of the painting, back into harmony with the ensemble, by which I mean the *accord* (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 101). Pissarro’s last apartment in Paris was on the Quai Voltaire. His last landscapes represent the perspective of the dock, slightly curved in a circular arc, with the dome of the Institut de France, the booksellers’ stalls, and the hurried passersby. This is where the painter died on 13 November 1903. Pissarro was a relentless worker. Octave Mirbeau wrote of him that he was happy simply because, in the course of his seventy-three years of life he had one great and noble passion: work. With a serene smile spreading beneath his white beard, he had told the writer that work was wonderful for regulating mental and physical health: when he was working he forgot all his sorrows, all his troubles. His paintings sold as poorly as those of the other Impressionists, and his life was difficult, but he had always shown the same warmth towards his friends. He rejoiced at Renoir’s luck when he managed to exhibit at

Camille Pissarro,

Hay Harvest at Eragny, 1901.

Oil on canvas, 53.9 x 64.7 cm.

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

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the Salon. He mourned the death of Berthe Morisot, whose talents he appreciated and who, he said, had swept the Impressionist group off of their feet with her talent and feminine charm, but who was practically unknown to the public. As in the past, he stayed active in public life. During Zola's trial he wrote that France was seriously ailing, and, in a short note to Zola, he expressed his admiration. He signed a protest with Claude Monet, Octave Mirbeau, and others. Pissarro himself, like Sisley, was usually mentioned as part of a general survey, among other landscape painters, but he accepted this with serenity. He said this affected him little, that the works were there and that they, at least, would remain. In a letter written 22 September 1903, shortly before his death, Pissarro bemoaned the fact that art lovers were not pressing to buy the paintings of the Impressionists. "It will take some more time for even our friends to understand us." It took as long as it had for the other Impressionists before he began to be recognised. It was not until after the painter's death that Théodore Duret, in 1906, wrote that the fields Pissarro represented had a soul, that they conveyed a deep sense of enchantment, and that little by little his contemporaries had learned to appreciate him. It was only later that evaluations of the history of Impressionism granted Pissarro the position that was his due: Georges Lecomte characterised him as the founder of Impressionism, and Thadée Natanson, editor of *La Revue Blanche,* called him the "apostle of Impressionism."

Camille Pissarro,

Woman Bathing her Feet in a Brook, 1895.

Oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm.

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.

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Edgar Degas (1834-1917)

"He fell in love with all that is modern"

(Edmond de Goncourt)

Degas was closest to Renoir in the Impressionist's circle, for both favoured the animated Parisian life of their day as a motif in their paintings. Degas did not attend Gleyre's studio; most likely he first met the future Impressionists at the Café Guerbois. It is not known exactly where he met Manet. Perhaps they were introduced to one another by a mutual friend, the engraver Félix Bracquemond, or perhaps Manet, struck by Degas' audacity, first spoke to him at the Louvre in 1862 – Degas was copying from Velázquez's *Infanta* directly onto a copper printing plate. He was only two years younger than Manet, witty and superbly educated, and before long they were enjoying themselves greatly in each other's company. Like Edouard Manet, he spoke out against official art and the traditional school of painting, but did not adopt extreme positions. On Friday 13 February 1874, Edmond de Goncourt noted the following in his journal: "Yesterday I spent my afternoon in the studio of a painter named Degas. After a lot of attempts and experiments, of reconnoiters in every sense of the word, he fell in love with all that is modern (…) This boy Degas is indeed an original: sickly, neurotic, and so nearsighted that he fears he'll lose his eyesight, but for this very reason, an eminently sensitive being, receptive to the effects of the particular qualities things possess. Up until now he's the best man I've seen at catching the soul of modern life when he depicts it" (J. Bouret, *op. cit.*, p.59). Two months later Degas exhibited his canvases with Claude Monet's group, and became one of the most loyal of the Impressionists: not only did he contribute works to every one of their exhibitions except the seventh, he also participated very actively in organising them. All of which was curious, because he was distinct in many ways from the other Impressionists.

Edgar Degas came from a completely different milieu than did Monet, Renoir and Sisley. His grandfather René-Hilaire de Gas, a grain merchant, had been forced to flee from France to Italy in 1793 during the French Revolution. Business prospered for him there. After establishing a bank in Naples, de Gas wed a young girl from a rich Genoan family. One of his six children was Pierre Auguste Hyacinthe, who was the first of his family to return to Paris. Looking out the window of his apartment one day in Rue La Rochefoucauld, he saw a young girl strolling in the garden of the house next door. Célestine Mousson's family was originally from the Antilles, and were traders of cotton, grain, sugar, and rum. Her father continued to look after his American business in New Orleans while living in Paris. The marriage between Célestine and the son of de Gas the banker united two wealthy families. On 19 July 1834, at number 8 Rue Saint-Georges in the building of the Bank of Naples, their son Edgar de Gas was born. Degas preferred to write his name simply as Degas, although he happily maintained relations with the numerous de Gas family relatives in Italy. Enviably stable by nature, he spent his entire life in the neighbourhood where he was born. He scorned and disliked the Left Bank, perhaps because that was where his mother had died. In 1850 Edgar Degas completed his studies at Lycée Louis-le-Grand, and in 1852 received his degree in law. Because his family was rich, his life as a painter unfolded far more smoothly than did that of the other Impressionists.

Edgar Degas,
Self-Portrait, c. 1863.
Oil on canvas, 92.1 x 66.5 cm.
Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon.

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He started his apprenticeship in 1853 at the studio of Louis-Ernest Barrias and, beginning in 1854, studied under Louis Lamothe, who revered Ingres above all others and transmitted his adoration for this master to Edgar Degas. Degas' father was not opposed to his son's choice. On the contrary: when, after the death of his wife, he moved to Rue Mondovi, he set up a studio for Edgar on the fourth floor, from which the Place de la Concorde could be seen over the rooftops. Edgar's father was himself an amateur painter, and a connoisseur. He introduced his son to his many friends. Among them were Achille Deveria, curator of the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Bibliothèque Nationale, who permitted Edgar to copy from the drawings of the Old Masters there: Rembrandt, Dürer, Goya, Holbein. His father also introduced him to his friends in the Valpinçon family of art collectors, at whose home the future painter met the great Ingres. All his life Degas would remember Ingres' advice as one would remember a prayer: "Draw lines (…) Lots of lines, whether from memory or from life" (Paul Valéry, "*Ecrits sur l'Art*" *["Writings on Art']*, Paris, 1962, p. 187). According to Valéry, Degas recounted to him a very similar version of Ingres' advice. When he brought some drawings to show to Ingres, the master declared: "That's good! Never work from nature, young man. Always work from memory and the engravings of the masters" (P. Valéry, *op. cit.*, p. 187). Degas drew from nature, and from memory, and from the engravings of the great masters as well, all the more so because he had the opportunity to copy from the originals.

Starting in 1854 Degas travelled frequently to Italy: first to Naples, where he made the acquaintance of his numerous cousins, and then to Rome and Florence, where he copied tirelessly from the Old Masters. His drawings and sketches already revealed very clear preferences: Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Mantegna, but also Benozzo Gozzoli, Ghirlandaio, Titian, Fra Angelico, Uccello, and Botticelli. He went to Orvieto specifically to copy from the frescoes of Luca Signorelli in the cathedral there, and visited Perugia and Assisi. The pyrotechnics of Italian painting dazzled him. "I somewhat regret seeing so many beautiful things," he said. "I've already got to leave. Everything is suffused with poetry, everything is beautiful, the details of things, the overall unity. I'd rather do nothing at all than just to do a quick sketch without really having looked closely. My memories will be still more valuable" (J.Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 20). Degas was also drawing in the lively streets of Italian cities; there are a great number of sketches and studies to be found in his travel scrapbooks. His father, a connoisseur of painting and a born educator, offered some advice: "Have you observed and really contemplated those charming fifteenth-century fresco masters, have you crammed your head with it, have you made pencil sketches, or better, done watercolours from them so you'll remember their colour tints?" he wrote to his son in Italy. "And Giorgione – have you carefully analysed the admirable tonalities of his colour schemes, together with such superb draughtsmanship – so elegant? Have you truly drunk it all in? You must explore and understand the stylistic devices of the great masters, but then be free of all restraint when you have nature there before you, and reproduce it from your own inspiration alone. If you are able to render it distinctly and with authenticity, you're very fortunate. Then you've fulfilled the painter's true mission" (J.Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 23-24). Degas was lucky like no other. One can only marvel at the sensitivity Edgar's father demonstrated with respect to his son's vocation, at his insight into his son's goals, and at the way he was able to encourage the young painter. "You've taken a giant step forward in your art, your drawing is strong, your colour tone is precise," he wrote his son. "You no longer have anything to worry about, my dear Edgar, you are progressing beautifully. Calm your mind and, with

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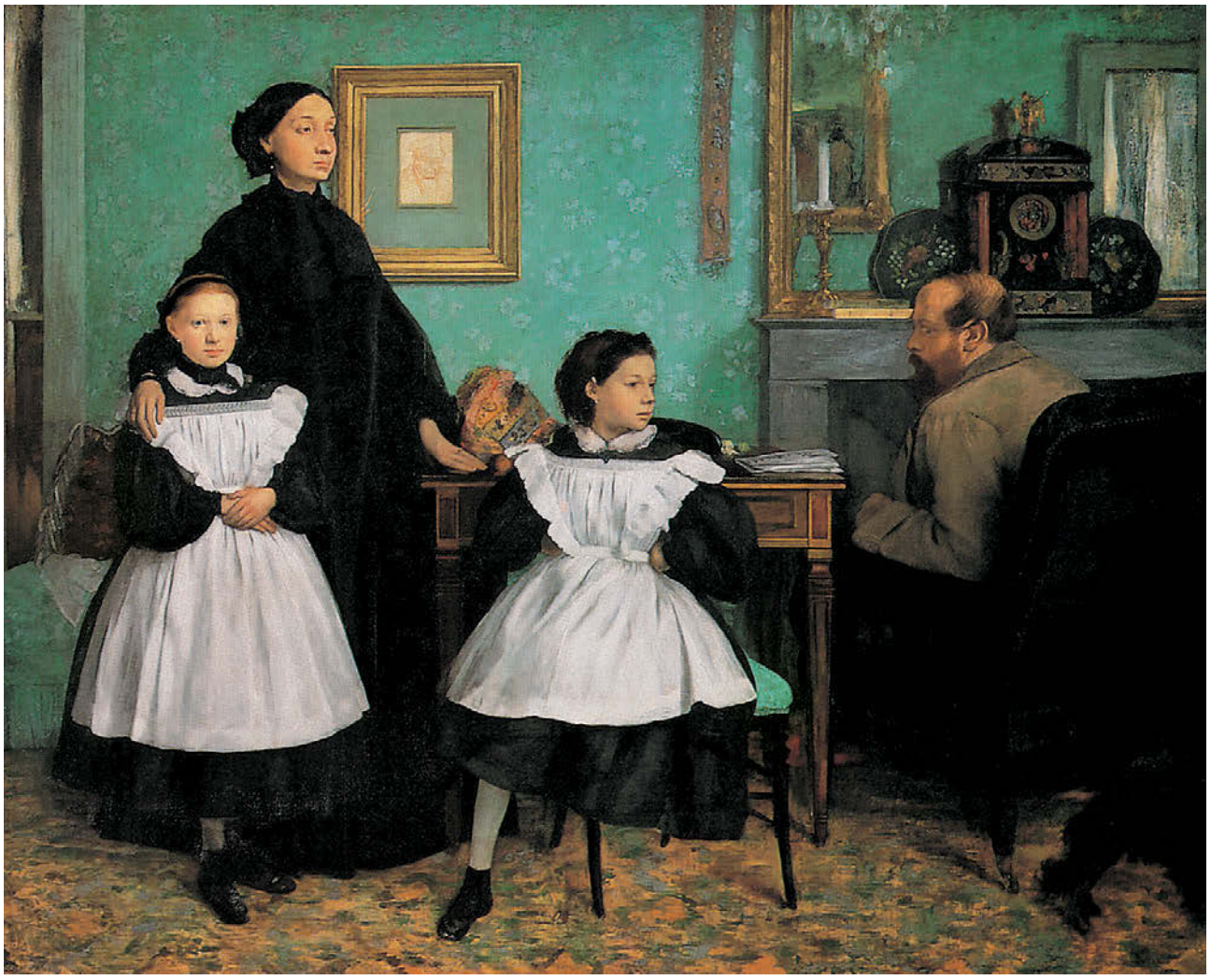

Edgar Degas,
The Family Portrait, known as *The Bellelli Family*, 1858.
Oil on canvas, 200 x 250 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

tranquil and sustained effort, stick to the furrow that lies before you without straying. It's your own – it is no one else's. Go on working calmly, and keep to this path" (J.Bouret, *op. cit.*, p.23).

In 1855 Degas began to pursue studies at the Ecole des beaux-arts, but did not show any particular zeal for his work. Much later he would explain his attitude towards this school: "The Ecole des beaux-arts, as it is now set up, produces nothing but timid artists with a total lack of that originality which is indispensable, and it should be done away with. It's harmful, in the main, and should be replaced with studios where the students would be able to work for free from the live model. Any artist could be authorised to teach there, with the students' agreement. And that's all." Degas preferred to learn at the museums: "The purpose of museums is to teach the history of art – and something else as well, because in the weak ones they stimulate the desire to imitate, while they give the strong ones the resources to free themselves" (J. Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 26). As soon as his first vacation arrived, Degas took the opportunity to return to Italy. There, at the Villa Medici, fate brought him into contact with residents of the Ecole des beaux-arts who would become his friends: the painters Léon Bonnat, Henri Fantin-Latour, Elie Delaunay, Gustave Moreau, the sculptors Paul Dubois and Henri Chapu, and the musician Georges Bizet, who had not yet composed *Carmen*. Their gatherings in the old neighbourhoods of Rome, and the picnics with the beauties of the Italian landscape in the background, would remain impressed on his memory to the end of his life.

In the 1850s Degas started doing portraits and self-portraits. The young man of twenty scrutinised his face attentively, as if looking for signs of the future that awaited him. In 1854-1855 he painted *Degas with a sketch*

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Edgar Degas,
Degas' Father Listening to Lorenzo Pagans Playing the Guitar, 1869-1872.
Oil on canvas, 81.6 x 65.1 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Portfolio (Paris, Musée d'Orsay). The painter, at twenty-one, is serious, self-absorbed, shy, and withdrawn. This self-portrait would be followed by others in which he appears more adult, loses his youthful shyness, becomes a dandy, and acquires a lightly mocking, slightly cynical look in his eyes *Degas saluant (Degas waving)* (Lisbon, Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian). From the very beginning in Degas' portraits, one senses an attentive observer of human psychology. In Italy he began to paint portraits of his family members. One of his very first is an admirable portrait of his grandfather, *René-Hilaire de Gas* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay). It brings Titian's portraits to mind. Its professional quality and Degas' ease in handling the idiom of classical painting makes it possible to compare it to portraits by Ingres. His subject has character: the tilt of the head,

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the look in the eye, and the line of the mouth reveals firmness, and on the other hand, kindness and understanding with regard to others. The colour scheme in the painting is subtle and harmonious. This canvas foretells a future for the painter as a great portraitist. And he indeed became a remarkable portraitist. It was only that afterwards, other areas of his work – "your modern life," as Edmond de Goncourt put it – overshadowed his portrait masterpieces. During the 1850s Degas began to paint the portraits of members of the Bellelli family, that of his father's sister, who had married Baron Bellelli. He did composition studies, sketched the baron and his wife, painted his own cousins Giulia and Giovannini, and studied the hands of his subjects. The result was a large painting – 2½ by 3 square yards, and painted in Paris, *The Bellelli Family*

Edgar Degas,
The Orchestra of the Opera House, 1865.
Oil on canvas, 56.5 x 46 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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Edgar Degas,
Mademoiselle Fiocre in the Ballet "La Source", c. 1867-1868.
Oil on canvas, 103 x 145 cm.
Brooklyn Museum, New York.

(Paris, Musée d'Orsay), that recalls the portraits of Holbein, Jean Clouet, or Velázquez. But the sky-blue wallpaper with small white flowers lightens the colour scheme, and gives the painting the cozy, intimate feel of a life of ease. The classical balance of the composition is broken, completely unexpectedly, by a single detail: the master of the house, seated with his back to the viewer, turns so spontaneously and with such liveliness towards his wife that, in an instant, the impression of models in the act of posing vanishes. With his solid training in classical principles, the painter is beginning to turn, little by little, to that modern life which will soon absorb him completely.

At the same time, in the beginning of the 1860s, Degas was painting his classical compositions under the influence of the Ecole des beaux-arts. During his trip to Italy in 1857, when he was fascinated only by the great masters, subjects taken from their lives still figured among his projects. His sketches of Giotto as

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a child have been found: Giotto is seated on a rock drawing a sheep – this was how Cimabue had discovered his talent. The translation of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Greatest Italian Painters, Sculptors and Artists* had been published in 1841, and subjects inspired by the lives of these artists had become fashionable. While this project of Degas' never materialised, he nevertheless painted several large compositions. Among them was *Young Spartans Exercising* (p. 214). He had not yet become an independent master. Perhaps he was inspired by a drawing of Pontormo's, or a similar subject by Delacroix. One senses the direct influence of ancient Greek reliefs in the rhythmic lines of crisscrossing arms and legs. But the drawing of the frail, graceful groups of boys and girls already betrays that interest in the movements of ballet dancers that later would wholly captivate the painter. In *Semiramis building Babylon* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), which might have been suggested by a performance of Rossini's *Semiramis* at the Paris Opera, the noble beauty of the figures recalls the frescoes of Pierro della Francesca. The enormous painting *Jephthah's Daughter* is full of the influences of different masters, from Poussin to Raphael, and Delacroix. The painting *Scene of War from the Middle Ages* or *The Misfortunes of the City of Orléans* (p. 215), with its baffling subject, could have been drawn from a tale that Degas' grandfather, who was originally from Orléans, had told him. It reminds one of Delacroix. Degas' classical compositions were elegant and balanced, and the nude paintings have a distinctive precision of construction and formal beauty. Everything seemed to point towards the traditional path of history painting, a professor's chair, and Salon prizes. Yet this period of studying his favourite masters past and present, and of veneration for them, came rapidly to a close in Degas' work. As early as the 1850s he discovered two absolutely new and unexpected subjects: horses and the ballet. In 1859 the Valpinçon family invited Edgar to spend a few weeks at their estate in Mesnil-Hubert, in Orne, where they had a horse-breeding farm. "It's England, in every respect," wrote Degas delightedly, "large and small pastures, enclosed by hedges. Damp footpaths, and ponds – green and umber coloured. (…) It's completely new for me (…)" (J. Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 29). Degas was reminded of Corot's tranquil compositions, though he was not himself much interested in landscapes. "Fallen leaves crackle underfoot; one expects to see horses breaking out (…) from the terrace behind the chatêau, seen from across the countryside, which looks exactly like English coloured prints of racetracks and hunting !" (J. Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 29). Degas did not think of the English engravings depicting hunting and the races by accident; he likely had already become interested in horses before this. However, in English engravings and paintings these magnificent animals were static, allowing themselves to be contemplated and admired. Degas was interested in horses in motion. He had drawn horses in his classical compositions, but there they played only a secondary role. He hadn't yet begun to study these animals in depth. His friends related that it never occurred to him to mount a horse, and he was incapable of telling a thoroughbred from a half-bred jumper. Yet no one represented a thoroughbred better than Degas. On the Valpinçons' estate he became aware, for the first time, of the beauty of the musculature of horses and the perfect natural mechanics of their movements. He set himself to study them in an almost scientific fashion, in the paddock, on the tracks, and in the pastures. His eye noted their proportions, the particularities of the horse's skeleton and the play of its muscles. Among Degas' drawings there are a number of sketches of horses and riders; he observed how men and women each mounted a horse. During the 1860s and 1870s he became a painter of racetracks, horses and jockeys. His fabulous painters' memory retained the particularities of movement of horses wherever he saw them. After his first rather complex compositions

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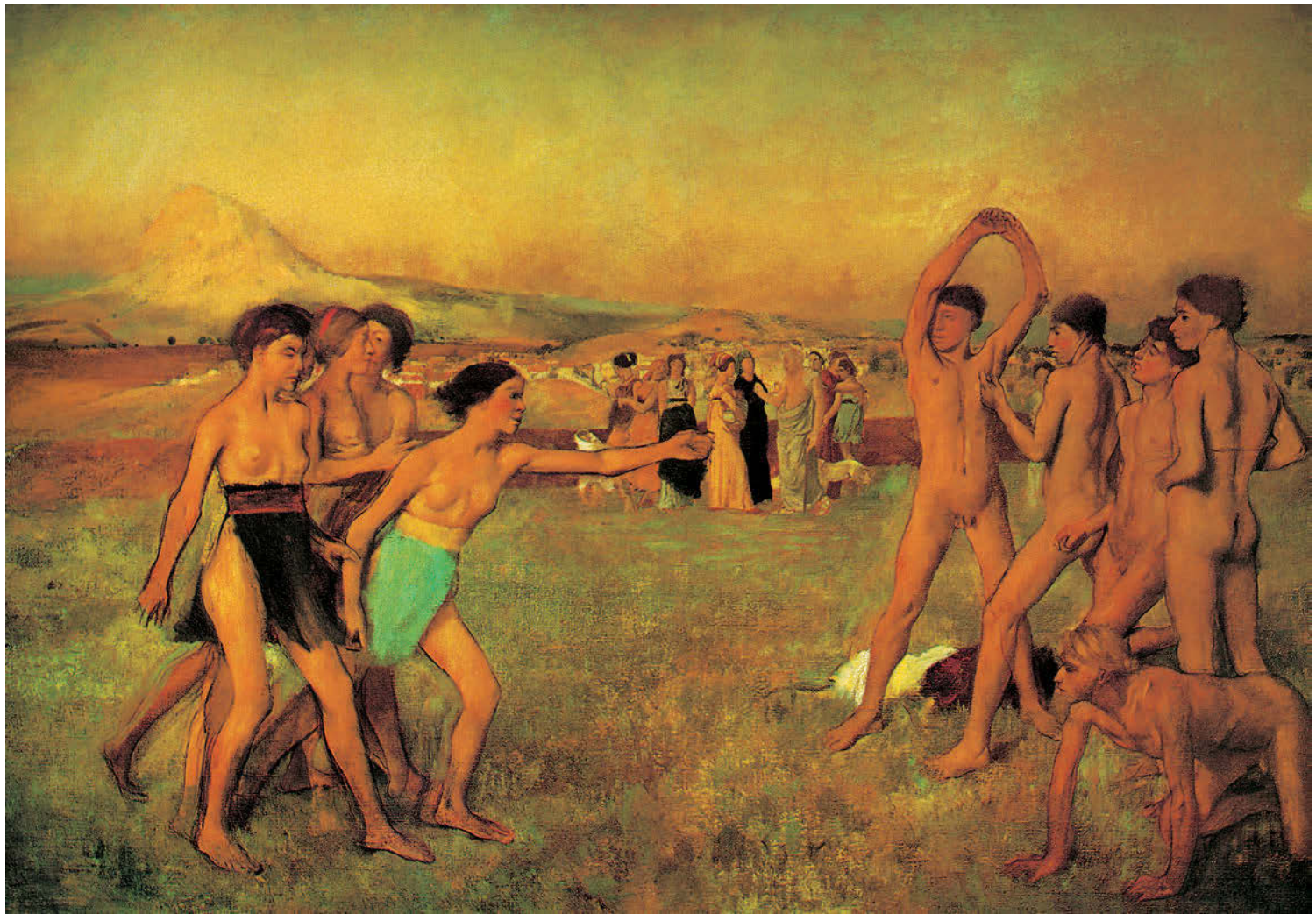

Edgar Degas,
Young Spartans Exercising, c. 1860.
Oil on canvas, 109.5 x 155 cm.
The National Gallery, London.

depicting racetracks, Degas learned the art of translating the nobility and elegance of horses, their nervous movements, and the formal beauty of their musculature. Horses became the embodiment, for him, of movement. In about 1872 he finished the composition on which he had worked for several years: *Racehorses* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay). The style is extremely restrained. The horses in the foreground are painted with a foreshortening that could have only been learned from the great Italian masters, or from nature itself. The horse and jockey are as one. The linear perspective which extends towards the back of the racetrack is constructed according to all of Leonardo da Vinci's rules, but this scene takes its expressive power and authenticity from the direct observation of nature alone. Thus, at the moment of the Impressionists' first exhibition, he had fully absorbed one of their motifs.

Around the middle of the 1860s Degas made yet another discovery. In 1866 he painted his first composition with ballet as a subject: *Mademoiselle Fiocre in the Ballet "La Source"* (p. 212). Degas was going to the Paris Opera frequently, where in 1866 Eugénie Fiocre often danced "The Spring". It's true that, in this first painting, the ballet itself was not yet depicted. It was more a portrait of the ballet dancer. Mlle Fiocre is seated on stage surrounded by Oriental scenery, with a horse at her side. Degas had always been a devotee of the theatre, but from now on it would become more and more the focus of his art. It gradually permeated his painting through his portraiture. After Mlle Fiocre he turned to painting portraits of musicians. In 1869 he did an admirable portrait of his father with Pagans, the musician: *Degas' Father with Pagans singing* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay). Pagans occupies the foreground, wholly absorbed in his music, a

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guitar in his hands. In spite of the almost classical construction of the composition and the seemingly static nature of the subjects, there is action in this painting: Pagans is singing and Degas' father is listening. This becomes a characteristic aspect of Degas' art. Like Manet and the Impressionists, he rejects subject and literary narrative, but in his own paintings there is always something going on. In that same year of 1869 Degas painted *The Orchestra of the Opera House* (p. 211). At first glance this painting is also just a portrait of musicians. In fact it is a portrait of a whole group of the painter's friends, whom his imagination has gathered together in the orchestra pit. The faces are painted in close up, they are individualised, they have character, and, above all, they are not posing. They are engrossed in the music. Before Edgar Degas, no one yet had done anything like this. In the foreground one can recognise Pagans: at his side are Emmanuel Chabrier, the cellist Pillet, the choreographer Gard, the painter Piot-Normand, the composer Souquet, the doctor Pillot, and other friends of the artist's. This composition of Degas' categorically rejects the traditional concept of the portrait genre. The velour balustrade of the orchestra pit cuts through the foreground at an angle, giving the impression that the painter is watching from a chair in the front row seat. From there he can see not only the orchestra but also the stage on which the ballet is taking place. For the first time in a Degas painting, ballet dancers appear as they are performing, the patches of their pink and sky-blue tutus softly glittering. The figures of the ballet dancers are cropped by the stage front's edge and the upper edge of the painting, and they are also partially obscured by the immense horn of the double bass. A similar impression can be derived from a photograph, where what is in the foreground is significantly enlarged. It is the first time that Degas' precise

Edgar Degas,
Scene of War in the Middle Ages or *The Misfortunes of the City of Orléans,* 1860.
Essence and oil on paper mounted on canvas, 85 x 147 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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eye is seeing reality as the lens of a camera would. And it is the first time, in painting, that such a frankly fragmentary composition appears, occupying the canvas as if it had been scissored out from the life going on around it. Even that "audacious fighter" Edouard Manet, who linked a painting's space to that of real life, never had such audacity. Three years later, in 1872, Degas' first painting devoted solely to the ballet appeared: *Le Foyer de la danse à l'Opéra de la rue Le Peletier (The Dancing Anteroom at the Opera on Rue Le Peletier)* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay). In a carefully constructed composition, with groups of figures balancing one another to the left and the right, each ballet dancer is involved in her own activity, each one is moving in a separate manner from the others. Extended observation and an immense number of sketches were essential to executing such a task. This is why Degas moved from the theatre on to the rehearsal halls, where the dancers practised and took their lessons. And it was how Degas arrived at the second sphere of that immediate, everyday life that was to interest him. The ballet would remain his passion until the end of his days.

Edgar Degas,
Parade (Race Horses in front of the Tribunes), 1866.
Oil on paper glued on canvas, 46 x 61 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

When the Franco-Prussian war began in 1870 Degas enlisted in the French National Guard artillery. During the war two important events in his life took place. First, the captain of his battery turned out to be the engineer Henri Rouart, his classmate from Lycée Louis-Le-Grand. From the moment of their re-encounter they would remain friends for the rest of their lives, and this friendship would play an important role in Degas' life. It was during his service in the army, as well, that he learned he might lose his eyesight, which would have a tragic impact on his life. It was difficult for him to work while in the army, but he nevertheless painted an admirable portrait of three of his comrades: *Jeantaud, Linet et Laine (Jeantaud, Linet, and Laine)* (1871, Paris, Musée d'Orsay). He had definitively given up representing posed models. His figures are distributed freely in space and each is seated in a natural position, deep in his own thoughts. Like *The Orchestra,* this painting indeed presents a fragment of the life going on around its maker. Already, at the beginning of the 1870s, the concept of this painting is an Impressionist one. However, before joining Claude Monet's group, Degas took one more remarkable step in the direction of the new art.

During the Paris Commune of 1871 the painter stayed at the Mesnil-Hubert estate, where he sketched horses and painted portraits of members of the Valpinçon family. Upon his return to Paris he continued to attend the Opera and its dance foyer, where he sketched the ballet dancers. The composition *Le Foyer de la Danse à l'Opéra de la Rue Peletier (The Dance Foyer at the Opera on Rue Peletier)* was painted at this time. In that same year of 1872 Degas went to New Orleans to visit his mother's relatives, who were cotton traders. Although the purpose of the trip was business, he sketched a great deal. Though by nature disinclined to react with much emotion, he was happy about his new impressions, all the same. "Everything appeals to me here," he wrote a friend. "I am paying attention to everything going on around me (…) Most of all I like the

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Negresses of every shade, carrying the whitest little white children in their arms, seen against white houses with fluted wooden columns and gardens of orange trees, and the ladies in muslin (…)" (J. Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 54). As odd as it might seem, the drawings and studies he brought back with him didn't reflect these impressions in any way. Degas believed that art did not come about quickly. "The instantaneous – that's photography, nothing more." If these words seem to convey a note of contempt for photography, it is because he himself was not aware of the influence photography had on him, and because his own working methods were completely different. Degas looked, and retained what he saw. Far from Paris, he felt nostalgic for it and dreamt of returning as quickly as possible. It seemed to him that in New Orleans they lived from cotton and for cotton alone. Degas wanted to be at work in the familiar context of his Parisian studio. He painted his remarkable work *Portraits dans un bureau à la Nouvelle-Orléans (Portraits in a New Orleans Office)* (1873, Pau, Musée des Beaux-Arts) once he was back in Paris, from studies done on the scene. It would more appropriately be titled *Cotton Office*. All of the figures represented are portraits, and are easily recognisable: Henri Mousson, Degas' uncle, is in a top hat in the foreground, and Edgar's brothers are in the back of the room. The figures of employees are scattered, as if at random, across this interior, each attending to his own affairs. The work in the office carries on and no one, it appears, notices the painter, who labours away to capture this life on the canvas. He represents all the details of the furnishing in a naturalist style, as he would have done with a camera. Only, unlike a camera, the painter himself is constructing this fragment of life. It was no accident that Degas was grouped with the future Impressionists for the first exhibition in Nadar's gallery.

Edgar Degas,
Jockeys, c. 1882.
Oil on canvas.
Yale University Art Gallery,
New Haven, Connecticut.

For the 1874 exhibition Degas contributed canvases and drawings with motifs that, from then on, would be his own for the rest of his life: the theatre, ballet classes, washerwomen, racetracks, and nudes. In the exhibition that followed, portraits, milliners, and paintings executed from impressions of New Orleans appeared. Cabarets and the circus would come later. At the beginning of his development as an Impressionist two paintings represented extremely important steps. Degas had previously painted the portrait of his friend Ludovic-Napoléan Lepic. Engraver, painter and sculptor, the grandson of one of Napoleon's generals and the son of a Bonapartist, he is represented here with his daughters Eylau and Janine: *Ludovic Lepic et ses filles (Ludovic Lepic and his Daughters)* (Zurich, Buhrle Foundation). This is actually a portrait, although it is very freely constructed. In 1875 Viscount Lepic appeared in a strange new painting by Degas: *Place de la Concorde* (St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum). Lepic, two of his daughters, and a dog are crossing the square, their figures cropped by the lower edge of the canvas. The passerby on the left hasn't yet entered the space

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of the painting, and for this reason the centre remains empty. The Place de la Concorde, which runs alongside the Ministry of the Seas and the terrace of the Tuileries Garden, itself becomes the central subject of this composition. One has the feeling that the passersby have been caught at random by the lens of a camera, and that the painter has by some miracle managed to capture that sense of the ephemeral moment in life that the Impressionists were after. And, like nineteenth-century photos, this work has been painted using almost no colours; only the warm, pink tone of the faces and three small patches of red enliven the ensemble. But Degas' grey is not monotone. From the warm, golden tone of the square to the chilly tone of Lepic's morning coat, his grey passes through numerous gradations in nuance, recalling the lessons of Corot – lessons that Degas, as well, could not do without. The associations with the camera lens are not accidental. Degas was the only painter of his generation who took photography seriously. He began to be interested in it rather late, in the middle of the 1880s, and bought a camera around 1895. This proves that the unique features of Degas' compositions do not relate to the direct influence of the camera, but to the specificity of his own vision of the world. And when he began to take photographs himself, it was his vision that influenced the compositions of his photographs, not the other way around.

In 1876 Degas painted *In a Café (The Absinthe Drinker)*. At that time the artists had already abandoned the Café Guerbois and reunited at La Nouvelle Athènes in the Place Pigalle. Degas had lived in this neighbourhood for a large portion of his life: in Rue Blanche, Rue Fontaine, and Rue Saint-Georges. He could now be seen regularly in the evenings, on the terrace of La Nouvelle Athènes, with Edouard Manet, Emile Zola, and various Impressionists and critics. For his new painting he asked his friend the engraver Marcellin Desboutin, just back from Florence, and the pretty actress Ellen Andrée to pose for him. Ellen Andrée would later pose at the same location, on the terrace of La Nouvelle Athènes, for Edouard Manet's *The Plum,* and also for Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (pp. 150-151) on the island of Croissy. Degas depicted her as a prostitute of the Parisian streets with a lost look, sitting absolutely still before a glass of absinthe, absorbed in thought. At her side, a pipe clenched between his teeth and hat pushed back onto his neck, one of the café regulars is seated. He seems to be looking into the distance, not aware of the woman seated just beside him. Squeezed into a corner behind little empty tables, they are almost touching one other, but each is in their own world. Again, Degas has succeeded in setting down on the canvas something almost impossible to capture: the bitter solitude of a human being in the merriest, liveliest city in the world. Here, as well, there is nearly an absence of colour. Only some delicate pinkish and bluish accents work to enhance the range of greys. This attracted attention, and astonished many in the bright, colour-filled world of the Impressionists. Degas was indeed a "strange artist". In many respects his positions were identical with those of the Impressionists but, at the same time, so many things set him apart from his painting allies.

In the course of their apprenticeship years, Professor Gleyre had accused Renoir of painting for his own amusement. Degas, on the contrary, thoroughly enjoyed the tedium of relentless study. Paul Valéry told of examining a painting together with Degas in the Louvre, a very meticulously painted landscape by Théodore Rousseau: "It's superb, I said, but what a bore to make all those leaves. It must be really tiresome (…) – 'Quiet', Degas told me, 'if it wasn't tiresome, it wouldn't be any fun'" (Paul Valéry, *Degas. Danse. Dessin [Degas. Dance. Drawing]*, Paris, 1965, p. 107). Degas had acquired this fondness for the meticulous study of the real along with his classical training, while copying the ancient masters. He took pleasure in the process itself of a

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difficult, tiring project. Monet did not consider himself to be learned, but he observed the changes of colour in the open air with a researcher's tenaciousness. Degas sincerely felt his work to be a scholarly pursuit. In 1897 a friend spoke to the elderly Degas of the crowds that an exhibition of the Impressionist's paintings had drawn. "*Ah! Mon Dieu!* People crowding around our paintings, whatever for?" exclaimed Degas. "Are there crowds in a chemist's laboratory? (…) Not at all ! A chemist works in peace. But we, we belong to the whole world. What torture!" (Daniel Halévy, *Degas Parle [Degas Speaks]*, Paris-Geneva, 1960, p. 40).

One of the main differences between Degas' ideas and those of the other Impressionists was his point of view regarding open-air painting. For all the others, open-air painting was both an aim and an essential condition of their work. Degas himself painted landscapes, although rarely. There are wonderful drawings of landscapes from his youthful travels across France and Italy: trees in the foreground, their contours prettily highlighted, and very soft, distant backgrounds. During or after his stay in Boulogne with Edouard Manet he executed a series of views of the sea and coastal cliffs in pastel. Nevertheless his idea of landscape was not at all connected with working in the open air. His

Edgar Degas,
The Cotton Market at New Orleans, 1873.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm.
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Pau.

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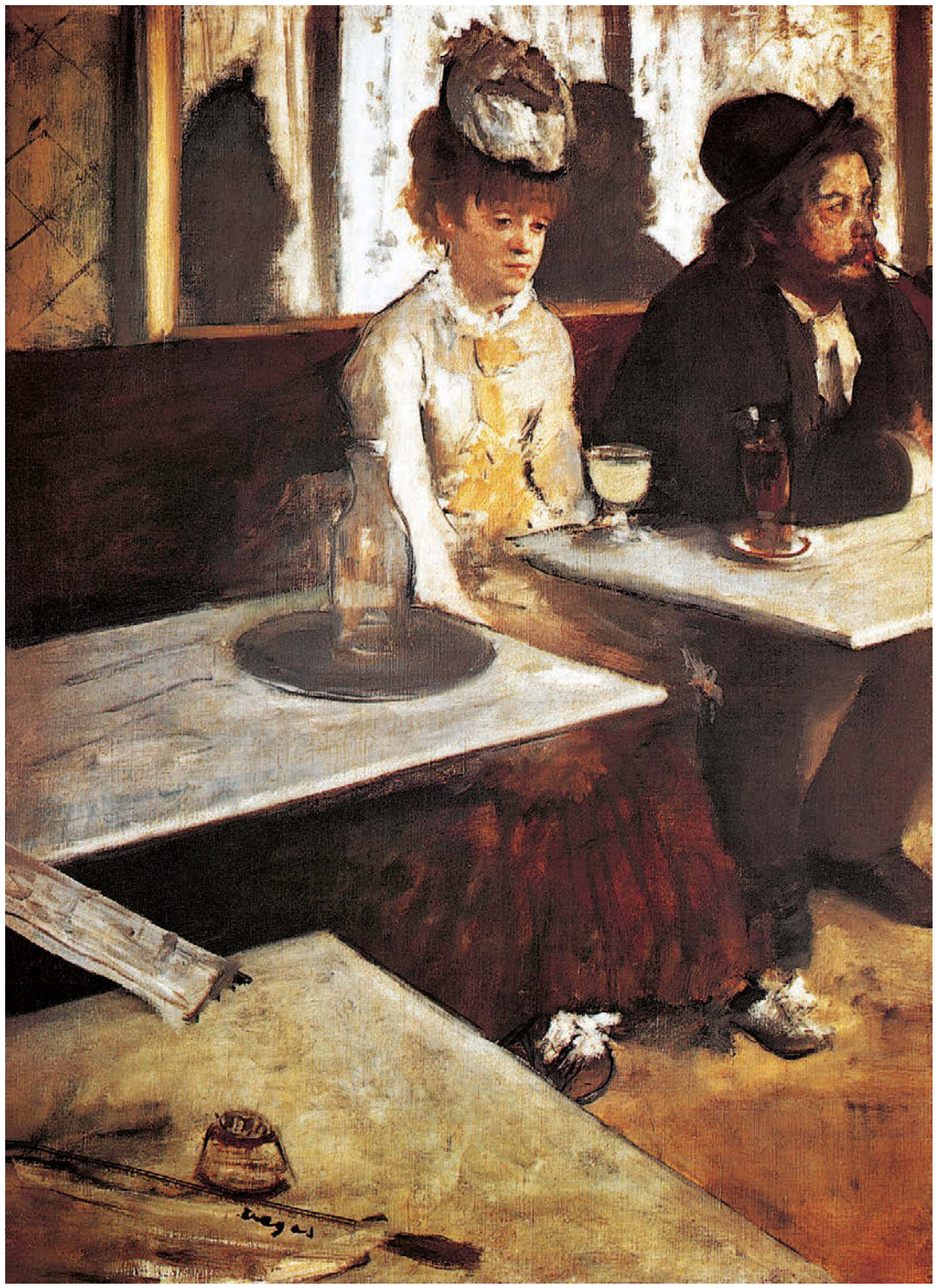

Edgar Degas,
In a Café
(The Absinthe Drinker), 1875.
Oil on canvas, 92 x 68.5 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

friend Daniel Halévy told how, after a train trip through Normandy, Degas one day declared: "I've finished eighty landscapes. 'Eighty landscapes !' we exclaimed. Well, yes – fantasies, dreamscapes'" (J. Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 165). From the train window he had watched the fields as they filed past, and seen the trees' reflections on the mirror-smooth surface of the Seine. That was all he needed for the landscape to imprint itself on his memory. Often, with Degas, it was not living nature that caused a landscape to appear on paper or canvas. On the contrary it was a shape, or a line seen at random, that would give birth to a landscape in his imagination. One day he brought home a stone from the street – at the time all the streets of Paris were in the process of being paved over. Degas showed it to friends: "What line, (…) as lovely as a human shoulder. I'll use it for a cliff, as seen from the open sea (…) A cape – and I know the name the sailors have given it, it's called Cape Lovely Shoulder" " (…) And he

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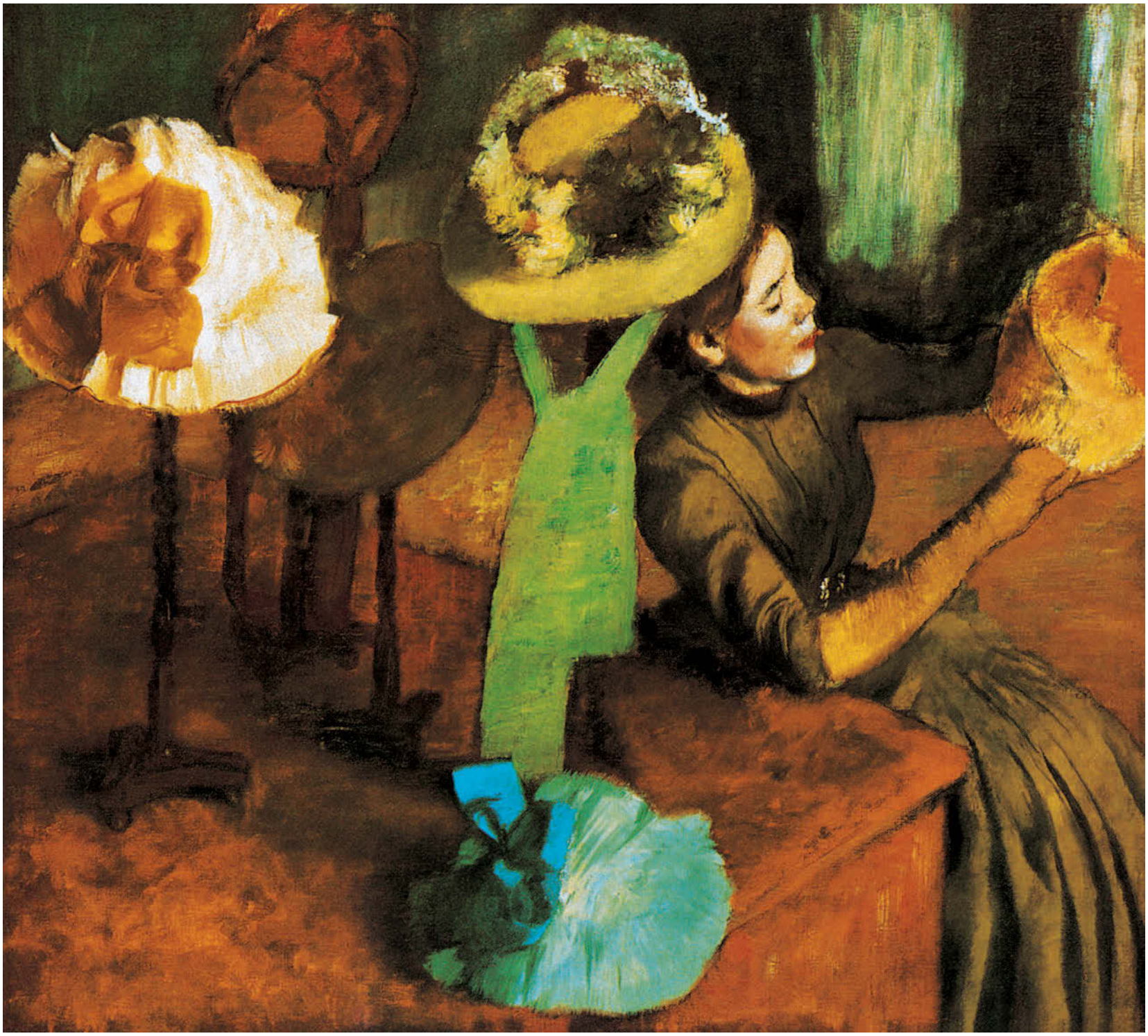

did just that'" (J. Bouret, *op. cit*, p. 165). Not only did Degas dislike working in the open air, he did not see the need for it. "Painting is not sports !" he would say (*Tout l'Œuvre peint de Degas [Degas' Complete Paintings]*, Paris, 1974, p. 6). He did not need the open air for the landscapes that served as backgrounds for his racetrack paintings or his nudes. When the art dealer Ambroise Vollard remarked to the painter that his model probably had posed for him on the beach, Degas replied: "Oh, well, I spread my flannel cardigan on the ground in the studio and sat my model down on it (…) !". And he added: "A painting is made to be hung on the wall of an apartment. Is the atmosphere inside the same as the atmosphere outside?" (J. Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 43). He mocked the Impressionists' passion for working in the open air: "Without even leaving the house, if you take some mixed herb soup and stick three bristly old brushes in the bowl, wouldn't you have all you needed to paint all the landscapes in

Edgar Degas,

The Millinery Shop, 1884-1890.

Oil on canvas, 100 x 110.7 cm.

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.

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the world?" (J. Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 172). This odd attitude of Degas' towards landscapes had two explanations, however. Firstly, Degas' greatest misfortune mustn't be forgotten, the weakness of his eyesight. He couldn't have worked in the open air even had he wished to do so. "What lovely country !" he wrote of Dieppe to Durand-Ruel. "I've been taking walks around the environs everyday; it could easily end up turning me into a landscape painter. But my miserable eyes won't let that transformation happen" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 100). What was most important, though, was that Degas had more confidence in his prodigious memory than in a fleeting impression.

The second difference between Degas and the Impressionists was in his attitude towards drawing. Renoir and his friends had been accused of not knowing how to draw because, in their work, the vibrations of air and light had the effect of blurring their line; their colour predominated over their drawing. For Degas drawing always came first. All of the critical literature on Impressionism speaks to this. Philipe Burty characterised him as "…a ready and knowledgeable draughtsman" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 292). "With one line he says all there is to be said, better and more quickly," wrote Georges Rivière (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 313). When asked what he understood "drawing" to be, Degas responded with an expression typical of him: "Drawing is not form, but a way of seeing form" (P. Valéry, *Degas. Danse. Dessin [Degas. Dance. Drawing] op. cit.*, p. 197). Manet took note very quickly of his passion for drawing. In the period when they were continually trading barbed remarks at the Café Guerbois, he cuttingly observed to Degas: "Back in the days when I was representing my peers, you were still painting the story of Semiramis, Monsieur Degas. – 'You're as famous as Garibaldi, Monsieur Manet, but I got into the Insitute before you did' – That's right, Monsieur, with your drawing" (J. Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 58). In the Impressionists' circle such a stubborn preference for accurate, classicist drawing must have been perplexing. Maurice Denis told of how, in conversation with him, Cézanne had told him, "Degas isn't enough of a painter, he hasn't got enough of this (imitating the nervous, gestural strokes in Michelangelo's drawings)" (*Degas Inédit [Degas Unedited]*, Paris, 1989, p. 110).

Edgar Degas,
The Rehearsal, 1873.
Oil on canvas.
The Dumbarton Oaks Collection,
Washington, D.C.

Edgar Degas,
The Café-Concert at the Ambassadeurs,
1876-1877.
Pastel, 37 x 26 cm.
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon.

Yet it was with Cézanne that Degas had the most points in common. They were both full of regard for classical art, and both found inspiration in it. Cézanne expressed this wonderfully, in pithy declarations: "We've got to become classical artists again, using nature," and, "Imagine Poussin's work redone entirely, based on nature. That's what I mean by classical" (*Conversations avec Cézanne [Conversations with Cézanne]*, Paris, 1978, p. 80). They both favoured reason over intuition – indeed it was Cézanne who reproached Monet for being "nothing but an eye." "In painting," Cézanne said, "there are two things: the eye and the brain. Each should be helping the other. You have to work at their mutual development" (*Degas Inédit [Degas Unedited]*, Paris, 1989, p. 111). Because of these contradictions Cézanne turned away from the Impressionists while Degas, in spite of his and Cézanne's similar points of view, remained inseparable from them. "There are wonderful simultaneities of being, which could be compared to dissonant chords that enrich the flavourful differences of the timbres even

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more. Degas and Renoir, Monet and Cézanne; as there were Verlaine and Mallarmé (…) The richness of that time in Paris !" (P. Valéry, *Ecrits sur L'Art [Writings on Art], op. cit.*, p. 209).

After the death of Degas' father in 1873 the Degas family bank failed, and there was nothing left for the painter but to rely on his art. Like the other Impressionists, he suffered from the fact that his paintings were impossible to sell and, like Renoir, Monet, Sisley, and Pissarro, he went to Durand-Ruel to ask for money. And, like Sisley, he never painted commissions. He worked only on what interested him. He kept repeating, reworking and varying his same favourite motifs. He liked improving himself. His friends recounted how he could start over and over again on one and the same work without ever fully completing it. At the close of the 1870s Degas added cabaret scenes to his repertoire – before Manet had painted his *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. What is represented in *The Absinthe Drinker* is, in fact, the work of a stage or film director. In 1877 Degas painted two paintings, *Women on a Café Terrace,* sometimes called *Café, Boulevard Montmarte* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) and *The Café-Concert at the Ambassadeurs* (p. 223). In these the painter seems to be representing a moment glimpsed at random. "These are like small mirror fragments of universal life," said Philippe Burty of such Impressionist paintings, "and the things reflected there – swift and full of colour, subtle and charming – fully deserve that we give them our attention, that we celebrate them" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 290). Objectively and instantaneously the painter sets down on canvas the posturing, gestures, and expressions of the ladies as they chatter among themselves. "M. Degas seems to have hurled a challenge at the Phillistines, that is to say the classicists," wrote the critic Alexandre Pothey in an article on the third exhibition of the Impressionists. "The women in *Women on a Café Terrace* are frighteningly realistic. These painted, withered creatures, reeking of vice, cynically recounting the events and gestures of the day – you've seen them, you know them, and you'll come across them again on the boulevards soon" (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 303). Georges Rivière was astounded that one could catch the movements of heads thrown back, and the craning necks of onlookers enjoying an off-colour ditty accompanied by the singer's frank gestures, with such subtlety. Degas opened the doors of Parisian haunts of pleasure to generations of successor painters, among them Toulous-Lautrec, whose daring he admired. It seems strange that as refined an artist as Degas, a frequenter of society salons, would have been aware in Paris of those washerwomen and pressers who became the objects of his study. "M. Degas came over for a moment yesterday", wrote Mme Morisot to her daughter. "He was complimentary, though he wasn't really looking at all. He was vaguely attempting to be kind ! So here I am – an accomplished artist, according to all these great men !" (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot [Berthe Morisot, Correspondence]*, Paris, 1950, p. 59). Yet, when he was in New Orleans and felt nostalgic for France, it was the washerwomen who embodied and symbolised the French life of his time for him, to which he dreamt of returning as quickly as possible. "I'll leave it all with no regrets. Life is too short, and one only has so much strength. So long live the fine hand launderers of France !" He closely studied the movements of washerwomen lifting heavy baskets, and his numerous drawings of them bring Daumier's washerwomen to mind. He drew women leaning over their irons, and found an original grace and beauty in their repetitive movements. His firm line set down the mechanics of their movements, while the colour, by means of a few light patches, gave the appearance of a black and white photograph as it is being developed (*Two Pressers,* Paris, Musée d'Orsay). His eye was

Edgar Degas,
Edmondo and Thérèse Morbilli, c. 1865.
Oil on canvas, 117.1 x 89.7 cm.
Chester Dale Collection,
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

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Edgar Degas,

Dance Class at the Opera, rue Peletier, 1872.

Oil on canvas, 32 x 46 cm.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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Edgar Degas,

Ballet Rehearsal on Stage, 1874.

Oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

oriented in such a way as to capture movement as it happens in life, and transpose it into abstract lines and shapes on the paper or canvas. Degas, who in his life avoided women, was able to perceive like none other those nuances of their movements and appearance which create what is called charm: he noticed how a woman has it when she is looking at herself in the mirror. He revealed how the hats then in fashion, resembling exotic flowers, framed and emphasised the elegance of a simple milliner's movements (*The Millinery Shop*, p. 221).

At one point Degas took up writing verse; at the end of the nineteenth century the sonnet was very much in fashion. It's impossible to say what led Degas to poetry: his admiration for the sonnets of Verlaine and Heredia, or his friendship with Mallarmé. Paul Valéry, who knew Degas well, found an explanation in the painter's character. "Work itself stimulated him. A poet's work – if it consists of trying, through successive rough approximations, to arrive at a text that meets fairly precise conditions – must have seemed comparable for him to the work of the draughtsman, as he conceived it. But perhaps he wrote his first verses in jest, or as a parody" (P. Valéry, *Ecrits sur l'Art [Writings On Art]*, *op. cit.*, p. 200).

In his eyes, dance was superior to all the other arts, and the painter courteously explained this in verse: "*Les muses ont chacune leur fonction. / Clio préside à l'histoire, Euterpe à la musique, / Thalie à la comédie,*

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Melpomène à la tragédie ; / Erato à la poésie légère, Polymnie à l'ode, Uranie aux sciences, / Calliope à la poésie épique ; Terpsichore à la danse seule. / Mais dès que les muses ont accompli leur tâche, Toutes se mettent à danser ensemble" ["Each of the muses has their function. / Clio presides over history, Euterpe over music, / Thalia over comedy, Melpomene over tragedy; / Erato over light poetry, Polythymnia over the ode, Uranus over the sciences, / Calliope over epic poetry; Terpsichore over dance alone. / But once the muses have completed their tasks, They all begin to dance together"] (J. Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 59).

He painted ballet classes during lessons and as the dancers rested. It was rare for a ballet dancer to appear on his canvases as an airy, ethereal vision. Drawing, in these instances, makes way for colour to play the principal role. In the stage's unreal atmosphere, the pink, sky-blue and white tutus glitter and disappear. Except that certain details almost always spoil the effect: either a curtain partially obscures the figures as it goes down, or a lady's fan in the first row blocks a view of the scene. When he painted *Ballet Rehearsal on Stage* (p. 228), colour had disappeared and the composition on the canvas had been transformed into a black and white photograph. Most often, the ballet dancer in a Degas work is shown simply as a woman, exhausted from pushing herself too hard. She has lost her stage charm. She exercises endlessly at the bar, and she strains as she stretches her tired legs. She is

Edgar Degas,
The Rehearsal of the Ballet on Stage, 1874.
Oil colours with traces of watercolour and pastel on cream-coloured woven paper mounted on canvas, 54.3 x 73 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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weak and miserable. Hundreds of drawings have been preserved in Degas' sketchbooks of the arms and legs of ballet dancers, stopped in mid-motion. He drew a dancer's graceful head at different points as it turned around, as Watteau did. When he worked in pastel, the softness of his pink and sky-blue line transformed the ballet into dream. The truth of everyday life would enter in at the moments when the ballet dancer was protected from the gaze of strangers, or when, bent over with fatigue, she would have to go through the humiliation of a long wait to be seen by the theatrical director (*Waiting*, New York, Havemeyer Collection). In a letter to a friend Degas wrote that true art can "cast a spell over reality and give it the appearance of madness" (*Degas Inédit [Degas Unedited]*, *op. cit.*, p. 100). He knew how to conjure the figure of a ballet dancer in words as accurately as he did in his drawings: "*Elle danse en mourant, comme autour d'un roseau / D'une flûte où le vent triste de Weber joue ; / Le ruban de ses pas, s'entortille et se noue / Son corps s'affaisse et tombe en un geste d'oiseau (…) / Et ses pieds de satin brodent comme l'aiguille / Des dessins de plaisir, la capricante fille / Use mes pauvres yeux à la suivre peinant. / D'un rien, comme toujours, cesse le beau mystère / Elle retire trop les jambes en sautant, / C'est un saut de grenouille aux mares de Cythère*" ["She dances as she dies, like around a reed / Of a flute where Weber's sad wind plays; / the ribbon of her steps, twists and knots, / Her body collapses and falls in a birdlike movement (…) / And with pleasure her satin feet embroider drawings / like a needle, the capering girl / Uses my poor eyes struggling to follow her / For no reason, as always, the lovely mystery ceases / she draws in her legs so sharply as she jumps / a frog leaping into Cythera's pools"] (J. Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 191).

Ballet dancers were alive and real for him. He ventured to look at them with an ironic eye, and to observe the awkardness and ugliness of certain of their movements. At the sixth Impressionist exhibition everyone marvelled at the wax statuette of a ballet dancer, almost one metre high, *The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer* (p. 233). The tutu was of real white tulle, the bodice of waxed yellow canvas, the hair was knotted in a ponytail with a red satin ribbon, and the ballet slippers had yellow laces. Upright, in ballet position, her hands are behind her back, her head thrown back. "With her tarlatan petticoat, skinny, and as ugly as can be", wrote the critic Charles Ephrussi, "but standing erect, arching back, and swaying, with that angular movement common to dance apprentices. She is rendered firmly, boldly, and with shrewdness, in a way that conveys, with infinite wisdom, the private demeanor and manner as well as the profession, embodied in the person (…) An ordinary artist would have turned this dancer into a puppet. M. Degas has turned her into a distinct, incisive, technically precise work, and in a truly original form" (*Degas Inédit [Degas Unedited]*, *op. cit.*, p. 336-337).

The nude was no less important as an object of study for Degas: he drew it tirelessly all his life. "The same subject has to be done ten, a hundred times. Nothing in art should look like an accident, even movement" (J. Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 58). Movement, still more movement, always movement… Professional models would pose for Degas; his demands seemed absurd to them. Instead of sitting the young woman down or placing her, standing, in a well defined pose, he asked her to dry herself and do up her hair. Was the painter even drawing her? No: he stood standing against the wall, arms folded across his chest, watching her. Occasionally he climbed on a stool and watched her from above. Only after the model left would he begin to draw, when he knew each of his model's movements and foreshortened views, all the ways she had of turning around. "It's fine to copy what one sees: it's much

Edgar Degas,
The Four Dancers, c. 1903.
Pastel.
Private collection.

Edgar Degas,
Ballet Dancers in the Wings, 1880.
Pastel and tempera on paper, mounted on paperboard, 69.2 x 50.2 cm.
Norton Simon Museum of Art, Pasadena, California

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better to draw what one can no longer see – except in one's memory," said Degas. "It's a transformation, during which the imagination collaborates with memory. You only reproduce what has made an impact on you – I mean what is necessary. In that way your memories and your imagination are freed from the tyranny nature exerts." (*Tout l'Œuvre Peint de Degas [Degas' Complete Paintings]*, *op. cit.*, p. 13). Degas gained access to a world that, until then, had never let people from the outside come near: he represented women in their private surroundings, which belonged to them alone. He drew them in poses in which it is impossible to pose. She washes, squatting, in the bathtub. She combs her long hair, which a moment later she will toss back. Twisting around clumsily, she dries her back. Each drawing and each pastel seems to represent one image from an endless film of women washing and grooming themselves. "Up to now the nude has always been depicted in poses which assumed the presence of a public," said the painter himself. "But my women are simple, honest people, concerned with nothing beyond their own physical activity. Here's another of them, she's washing her feet, as if you were looking through a keyhole" (*Tout l'Ouevre Peint de Degas [Degas' Complete Paintings]*, *op. cit.*, p. 14). The result was hundreds of drawings, pastels, and sculptures.

As he grew older, Degas made more and more sculpture. "With my eyesight going," he said to the dealer Vollard, "I now have to take up blind men's work" (J. Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 209). He modelled, in wax, what he knew best: ballet dancers, horses and nudes. Ambroise Vollard was crestfallen to see how Degas would destroy his wax masterpieces so he could have the pleasure, as he put it, of starting them again. In his last years the painter was obliged to change apartments. The housekeeper he was used to, who had taken such good care of him, was leaving. His best friend Henri Rouart – they had been inseparable since they had served in the army together – was dead. Degas was almost completely blind. "Degas, more and more solitary and morose, not knowing what to do with his evenings, had thought of spending them, when the weather was good, on the upper decks of the streetcars or the omnibus," recounted Paul Valéry. "He would get on and let himself be taken to the end of the line, then back from the terminus to the stop nearest his home" (P. Valéry, *Degas. Danse. Dessin [Degas. Dance. Drawing]*, *op. cit.*, p. 126). As in days past he would engage models and, pacing up and down the studio, pretend to watch them. He was always alone, according to Paul Valéry, "alone by virtue of his character, alone in the distinctiveness and inflexibility of his principles and his judgments, and alone by virtue of his art, that is to say, by virtue of what he demanded of himself" (P. Valéry, *Degas. Danse. Dessin [Degas. Dance. Drawing]*, *op. cit.*, p. 244). From the moment he found himself alone in the dark, life lost its meaning for him. He felt utterly lost. Vollard said he no longer even liked destroying his pieces. He wandered aimlessly across Paris, wearing his cape and his old felt hat, resembling King Lear or the blind poet Homer. "Lifeless eyes beneath the fine arcs of the eyelids, the physiognomy of an almost spiritual nobility, with a calm, rested expression" (J. Bouret, *op. cit.*, p. 212). Paul Valéry said Degas probably had no more than a vague sense of what was going on around him. Occasionally he would ask, with complete indifference, "So…how about this war?" He died 27 September 1917. Among the group of several friends who came to accompany him to Montmarte cemetery there was only one Impressionist: Claude Monet. The other friend who had survived him, Renoir, was confined to an invalid's armchair. In the midst of the First World War, the painter's death went almost unnoticed.

Edgar Degas,
The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer,
c. 1879-1881.
Bronze (partially tinted), cotton skirt, satin hair ribbon, wooden base, h: 98 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

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Berthe Morisot (1841-1895)

"Ms. Berthe Morisot knew how to capture fleeting notes on her canvases"

(Georges Rivière)

A woman painter was a rare phenomenon in the mid nineteenth century and in the aesthetic camp hostile to official art, there was only one. Berthe Morisot participated in most of the Impressionist's exhibitions. Critics acknowledged her "strong standing among the other Impressionists," (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 320) and paid her complements with typical French gallantry. "Ms. Morisot has an extraordinarily sensitive eye," wrote Georges Rivière (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 319), who found her talent "so charming and so feminine". Philippe Burty held the appeal of her work in such high regard that he attributed the honour of generating interest in the Impressionists' exhibitions to her personally: "Ms. Berthe Morisot, with her dual status as woman and highly gifted artist, is ideally suited to bring in the public and the critics." (L. Venturi, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 292). It is possible that the presence of a woman among the intransigents really did arouse curiosity. In 1876, in an article in the *Calendrier parisien* on the subject of the second Impressionist exhibition, the critic Albert Wolff, an enemy of the Impressionists, ranked Morisot among the five or six lunatics who grabbed a canvas, some paints, and a brush, applied a few touches of paint at random, and then signed their name. Morisot's husband, Eugène Manet, went so far as to challenge the critic to a dual. But the opinion actually did justice to Morisot: it permanently linked her to Impressionism.

Berthe Morisot was born with a silver spoon in her mouth. Jean-Honoré Fragonard and the artist painter Marguerite Gérard were distant relatives on her father's side. Her father, Edmé Tiburce Morisot, held senior administrative positions. Berthe was born on 14 January 1841 in Bourges, in the administrative region of the Cher, because her father was then prefect of the Cher. Her mother, Marie-Cornélie Thomas, also from a prominent family, was the daughter of an inspector of public finances. Mrs Morisot oversaw her four children's education, inviting teachers into their home and instilling a taste for fashion and the social graces in her daughters. But it was upon the initiative of their father, an art collector, that three Morisot sisters started drawing lessons. In fact, all young girls from good families were expected to learn a bit of drawing and how to play the piano. At their home in Passy, the Morisots built a studio in the garden for their daughters to work in. The Morisots also located a professional painter in Passy named Joseph-Benoît Guichard, who discovered that painting at the home of Edma and Berthe was more than the passing fancy of two spoiled young girls, it was a true vocation: "With gifts such as your daughters have," he wrote to their mother, "my teaching will produce more than charming dexterity; they will become painters." (Dominique Bona, *Berthe Morisot*, Paris, 2000, p. 38). Edma gave up painting after she married. Only Berthe had enough courage and perseverance to fulfil Guichard's prophecy.

Edouard Manet,

Portrait of Berthe Morisot with a Fan, 1874.

Oil on canvas, 61 x 50 cm.

Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille.

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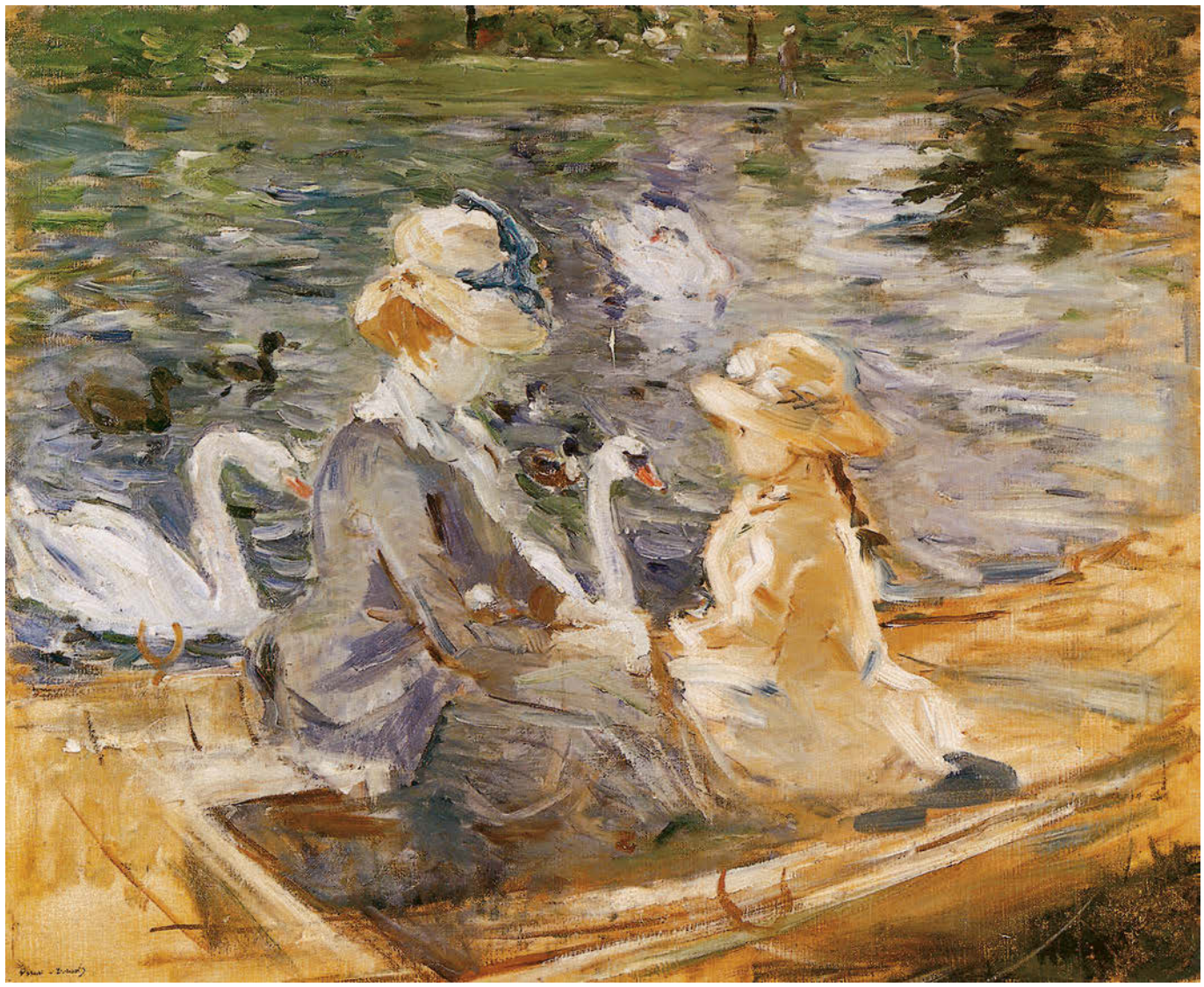

Berthe Morisot,
On the Lake in the Bois de Boulogne, 1884.
Oil on canvas, 60 x 73 cm.
Private collection.

The girls' first professor took them to Camille Corot, to whom Corot Berthe owed her love of landscape. Corot did not give lessons per se; he gave advice, and this advice formed the basis of Berthe's Impressionism. For example, Corot taught her to always keep her first impression from nature fresh. Corot became a permanent guest at Mrs Morisot's Tuesday social gatherings. In 1861, the Morisots even rented a house for the summer at Ville-d'Avray, so that Edma and Berthe could paint landscapes alongside Corot. Corot introduced the two young artists to his landscape painter friends Achille Oudinot and Charles Daubigny. In 1863, the Morisots rented a house not far from Auvers where Daubigny was living, so that Edma and Berthe could benefit from the lessons of his experience, as well.

The Morisot sisters regularly went to the Louvre to copy the old masters. The risk of contact with bohemians meant that Mrs Morisot always accompanied her daughters. The museum was the site of constant meetings between painters. It was there they met Henri Fantin-Latour around 1860. Mrs Morisot did not object to this encounter: Fantin-Latour was elegant, had good manners, and was already a successful painter. He introduced Berthe and Edma to the engraver Félix Bracquemond, who became a faithful friend of the Impressionists. A well-defined circle of artists got together with the charming and talented Morisot sisters and invariably these artists became regular guests at their home. Charles Durand, famous as a society portraitist under the name of Carolus-Durant, joined the circle. The family's old friend, the composer Gioacchino Rossini, came to dinner regularly. Later, the Riesener

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family (father, mother, and daughters) made their appearance. The painter Léon Riesener was a cousin of Delacroix and a student of Gros. He introduced Berthe to the Duchess of Castiglione Colonna, the sculptor known under the masculine pseudonym Marcello. The Belgian painter Alfred Stevens was also part of this circle; he was a friend of Edouard Manet and worked rather frequently in his studio. Puvis de Chavannes also became a household friend and one of Berthe's admirers.

It was only in 1867, while she was copying Rubens at the Louvre, that Berthe was introduced to Edouard Manet by Fantin-Latour. Soon afterwards, Manet and his wife and the Morisot family were constantly inviting themselves to each other's homes. Berthe met Degas at Manet's house and from that moment on Degas came nearly every Tuesday to Mrs Morisot's. During the summer of 1868, Edouard Manet wrote to Fantin-Latour: "I agree with you: the young Morisot ladies are charming. It's too bad they aren't men. Nevertheless, they could serve the cause of painting as women if each married an academician and sowed discord in the camp of those dotards!" (E. Moreau-Nelaton, *Manet raconté par lui-même*, Paris, 1926, vol. 1, p. 103). Manet had chosen a bawdy, ironic tone, although Berthe and Edma had been exhibiting in the Salon since 1864; in other words, they had already been accepted in the circle of professional artists. From their first meeting, Manet preferred Berthe and in 1868, she posed for him in *The Balcony*. Manet's portraits of Berthe Morisot have a special place in his work and in her life. When the Salon of 1869 opened with *The Balcony*, Berthe rushed to the room where Manet's

Berthe Morisot,
The Artist's Daughter, Julie, with her Nanny, c. 1884.
Oil on canvas, 59.1 x 71.1cm.
Minneapolis Institute of Arts,
Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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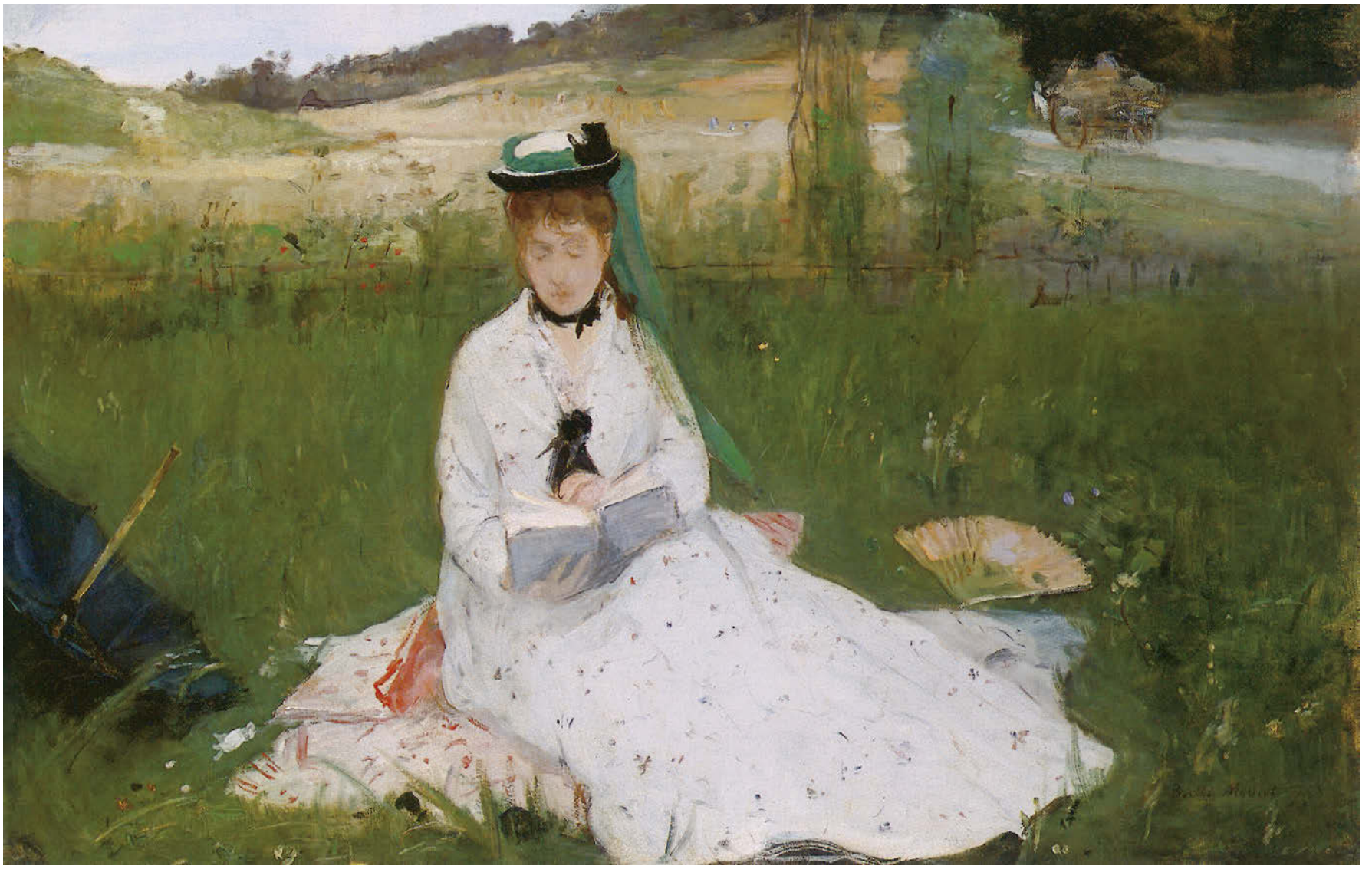

painting was hung. The next day (2 May), she wrote to Edma: "I found Manet there… He begged me to go see his painting, because he dared not go himself." Berthe offered objective criticism of her friends' work and regarding Manet, her opinion was rather critical: "His paintings produce as usual the impression of wild fruit or fruit that is a little unripe." (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 26). She was more perplexed by her own portrait in *The Balcony*: "I am more strange, than ugly; it seems that the epithet 'femme fatale' circulated among the curious." (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 27). Apparently, Berthe was as nonplussed by the portrait as by the reactions it generated. Shortly afterwards, in a letter to Edma, Mrs Morisot spoke of meeting Manet at the Salon: "His failure saddened him...He said sincerely that Berthe brought him happiness. He was very kind to me, because he likes Berthe." (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 31).

Berthe's letters show at what point Manet's opinion became important to her. She was unable to remain indifferent to his lack of attention, especially when Eva Gonzalès, the daughter of a prominent Parisian writer and student of the society painter Chaplin, appeared in Manet's studio. Eva wanted to take lessons from Manet, who seemed to like her very much and this preference was painful for Berthe. In August she wrote to her sister: "Manet gave me a lecture and offered the eternal Miss Gonzalès as a model; she has good manners and determination, she knows how to bring something to a successful conclusion, whereas I am incapable of anything. Meanwhile, he restarted his portrait for the twenty-fifth time." (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 33). Manet also preferred Eva as a model for

Berthe Morisot,
At the Ball, 1875.
Oil on canvas, 62 x 52 cm.
Musée Marmottan, Paris.

Berthe Morisot,
Reading, 1873.
Oil on canvas, 46 x 71.8 cm.
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland.

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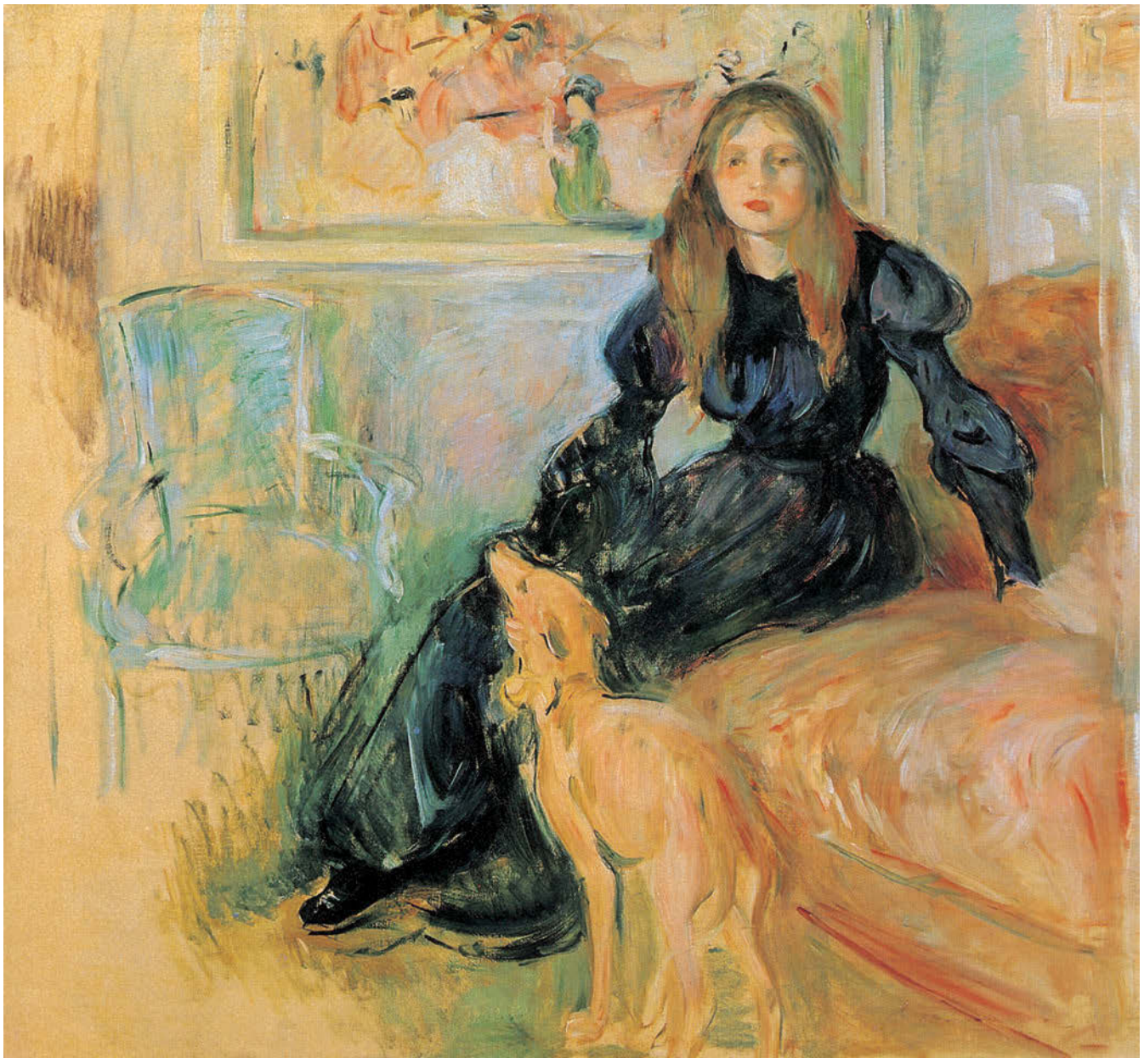

Berthe Morisot,

Julie Manet and her Greyhound Laërte, 1893.

Oil on canvas, 73 x 80 cm.

Musée Marmottan, Paris.

his painting. “We spent last Thursday evening together at Manet’s, who was wildly happy,” she wrote in September. “For a quarter hour, all his attention was concentrated on Miss Gonzalès, but her portrait still shows no progress.” (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 35). Berthe’s landscapes painted in Lorient had impressed a painter as respectable as Puvis de Chavannes, but Manet’s opinion mattered more to her. “The Manets came to see us Tuesday night and we went into the studio; to my great surprise and happiness I received the greatest praises,” she wrote with satisfaction. “It appears that it’s definitively better than Eva Gonzalès. Manet is too frank for one to get the wrong impression, I am sure that it pleased him a lot; but I remember what Fantin-Latour said: ‘He always thinks the painting of people he likes is good’.” (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 35). Berthe would become even more upset, because in her opinion, the portrait of Eva Gonzalès, once finished, was exemplary. “Manet has never done anything as good as the portrait of Miss Gonzalès; it may have even more charm than when you saw it,” she wrote to her sister.

Berthe was always prone to self-doubt and torment. After having praised the canvases that she did in Lorient, Manet added that it was unlikely they would be accepted in the Salon of 1869. The days

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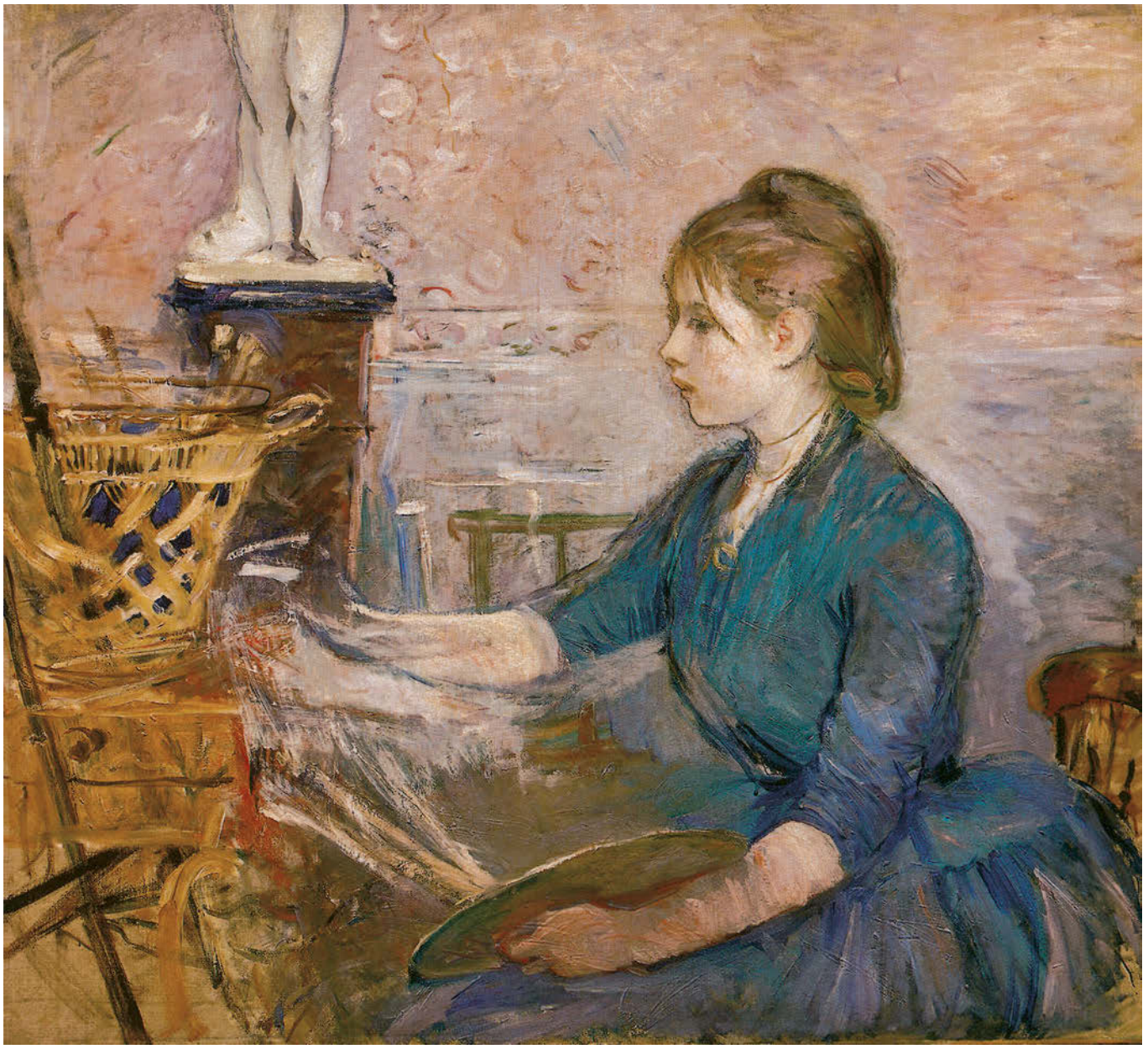

leading up to the opening were torture for her. Finally the Salon opened and she saw her painting had been included. “The exhibition revived Berthe some,” Mrs Morisot wrote to Edma. “Berthe received quite a few complements on her exhibit; she had her ups and downs like before; all the same, she was definitely a little distracted this week; I worry that this is only going to throw her into an even greater depression,” Mrs Morisot wrote anxiously. The late 1860s and the early 1870s was an especially painful period for Berthe. Her two sisters were married; only Berthe, now thirty, still lived with her parents, although she was much courted. No one knows her true relationship with Edouard Manet, but in early summer of 1870 she posed for him again.

Manet’s 1870 *Repose* (*Portrait of Berthe Morisot*) (p. 46), is a remarkable psychological study of a young woman. Executed in the style of a sketch, the painting makes for a particularly vivid portrait. The model has flung herself against the back of a sofa; one gets the impression she just sat down for an instant and became lost in thought. Berthe complained that Manet had made her hold an uncomfortable pose to the point of fatigue, but it is this pose, simultaneously hesitant and free, that helped Manet to grasp his model’s melancholy and despondent state of mind. The expression on her

Berthe Morisot,
Paula Gobillard Painting, 1887.
Oil on canvas, 86 x 94 cm.
Musée Marmottan, Paris.

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face was not meant to be seen; sadness had momentarily covered her eyes. “Her eyes,” wrote Paul Valéry, who knew Berthe Morisot well, “were almost too big, and so powerfully dark that Manet, in several portraits that he did of her, painted them black instead of their true greenish colour, in order to capture all their mysterious and magnetic power.” (P. Valéry, *Ecrits sur l’art*, *op. cit.*, p. 143).

Two years later, Manet painted *Berthe Morisot with a Bouquet of Violets* (private collection), which depicts a completely different Berthe. She looks younger here, her huge eyes in shadow gaze distractedly and her lips are poised to release a pensive smile. The stray hairs that fall from under her eccentric hat (“the latest fashion”) indicate she participated in bohemian culture. The predominance of black in the painting lends a mysterious character to the image of the young woman. The psychological complexity and many nuances of feeling that are difficult to put into words expressed the very essence of Berthe Morisot’s remarkable individuality and uniqueness. Paul Valéry considered this portrait a poem. And as if to conclude the poem, Manet painted a bouquet of violets pinned to her blouse, the painting’s only dash of colour, and a popular symbol of modesty. Manet constructed this little painting around the harmony of the tender blue violets and the red lacquer fan, which was Berthe’s attribute in all her portraits. A third still-life element consisted of a scrap of paper bearing the inscription: “To Miss Berthe Morisot.” With his eleven portraits, Manet contributed as much to the memory of Berthe Morisot as she did for herself through her own painting.

The year 1870 formed a line of demarcation between two eras for Berthe, as it did for the other painters. She learned that Degas and Renoir had left to join the army. Her brother was taken prisoner by the Prussians. Berthe stayed in Paris like Edouard Manet – she did not want to abandon her parents. Manet was indignant and tried to persuade her to leave. “What good will it do if you get wounded in the legs or disfigured!” he wrote. (D. Bona, *op. cit.*, p. 150). But Berthe was steadfast in her decisions. The national guard requisitioned her studio and turned it into quarters. She had no place to paint; to her, this was worse than the shelling. As she tried to draw and to work with watercolour, she became convinced that painting was the most important thing in her life. Terrible things were taking place all around her. Her brother returned from captivity and joined forces against the Commune; he shot at the Communards, among whom there had been many friends of hers. Paris was disfigured by the war. And Berthe cried for her studio, of which only ruins remained. Once again she was plagued by a lack of confidence in her vocation: “My mother told me politely yesterday that she had no confidence in my talent and that she didn’t think I was capable of doing anything serious,” she wrote in despair to her sister. (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 67). And again, she sought a supporter in Edouard Manet: “Last Thursday, he was very kind to me; he thinks I am not so ugly again and he would like me to come back and model; in my own boredom I will end up suggesting it to him myself.” (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 67).

Berthe applied herself seriously to painting. The Salon of 1872 included the portrait of her sister Edma that she had painted when Edma visited her parents to give birth to her daughter. Berthe travelled in the south of France and in Spain. It may have been during these trips that she understood how difficult it was to reproduce the effects of nature in painting. “Nothing was pretty as the sea yesterday and yet I didn’t think to do a sketch…I am somewhat of the opinion of Fantin-Latour; setting up before nature and thinking that I am going to render its effects in an hour seems ridiculous to me.” (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 72).

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1874 was a year of major change for Berthe. That winter, her father died in January of heart disease. Berthe, along with other painters, inaugurated the exhibition in Nadar's studio, which earned her the label "Impressionist" and some friends for life. Her teacher, Guichard, was horrified that Berthe exhibited "in that deleterious environment," (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 76), but nothing could stop her: she had found people who shared her ideas and with them she was taking a difficult route. The Manet and Morisot families spent the summer together in Normandy, in the little village of Fécamp. It was there that Edouard Manet's brother Eugène declared his intentions to Berthe. In the autumn, Berthe was posing for several portraits again for Manet. On 22 December, the marriage of Berthe Morisot and Eugène Manet took place at the Passy church. "I've entered a positive phase of my life, after living for a long time on dreams that didn't make me happy," she wrote to her brother. (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 80). The quiet life with Eugène, who became a friend to her, enabled Berthe to devote herself entirely to painting.

It was only natural for Berthe to have started out with landscapes: her first teachers were Corot and Daubigny. In May of 1864, Corot wrote in a letter to Miss Berthe Morisot: "Work hard and consistently; let's not think too much about papa Corot; it's much better to consult with nature." (P. Valéry, *Ecrits sur l'art*, *op. cit.*, p. 155). Berthe always followed this advice, especially since it corresponded to her personality: from the outset she had sought an independent path. She made countless sketches and studies in pencil and watercolour, drawing trees, blades of grass, and birds. In 1865, she did a landscape in oil that depicted thin trunks of birch trees in a green meadow with a little house in the

Berthe Morisot,
View of Paris from the Trocadero,
1871-1872.
Oil on canvas, 45.9 x 81.4 cm.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art,
Santa Barbara, California.

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Berthe Morisot,
The Cradle, 1872.
Oil on canvas, 56 x 46 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

background: *Thatched Cottage in Normandy* (private collection). As she was only twenty-four when she made this study, it naturally lacks confidence and maturity. Nevertheless, one already gets an indication of the later painter in the unusual lightness of her execution (her oil painting could resemble watercolour) and her unaffected tenderness towards the Normandy landscape.

With her parents in her youth and later with her husband and daughter, Berthe worked a lot in Normandy, especially around Fécamp; the landscape of this area remained her preferred motif. It was one of the things that drew her closer to the future Impressionists. In 1869, when Berthe went to Edma's house in Lorient, she painted a panoramic view of the port: *The Harbour at Lorient* (Washington D.C.,

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National Gallery of Art). The reflection of the boats in water as smooth as a mirror, the blue harmony of water and sky, and the painting's light palette – all herald her Impressionism. The figure of her sister in the foreground in a white dress shaded with pink and blue, demonstrates that Berthe had already come to perceive colour wherever it be, in both light and shadow.

Berthe's other motif was Paris. She was Parisian and had the city in her blood. In 1866, she painted a view of the Seine near the Iéna bridge, which was exhibited in the Salon of 1867. In 1872, she painted an amazing panorama of the city: *View of Paris from the Trocadero* (p. 243). The city stretches out below, immense and light. The skilfully painted grey-blue distances recall "Papa Corot" – it was

Berthe Morisot,
Madame Boursier and Her Daughter,
c. 1873.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 56.5 cm.
Brooklyn Museum, New York.

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difficult for Berthe Morisot not to think of him. Yet, during this period, she already had a different model to emulate. In the late 1860s, Manet had painted *The Funeral*, which depicted the domes of Paris in silhouette. Berthe arranged in a single line the towers of Sainte-Clotilde and Notre-Dame, the profile of Saint-Sulpice next to the dome of the church of the Invalides, and finally the dome of the Panthéon. These silhouettes were symbols of the city's history, which was changing before her eyes and it is the city in the midst of transformation that she painted, just like her Impressionist friends were doing. The canvas has remained a historical document of its genre. The foreground is marked by a bright green open space. Trocadéro palace had not yet been built and Berthe set up her easel on the terrace, the spot Paris guides recommended to tourists for admiring the city view. Three figures stand near the terrace balustrade: Berthe's models were her sister, Edma Pontillon and Yves Gobillard with her daughter Paule.

Berthe Morisot,
Chasing Butterflies, 1874.
Oil on canvas, 46 x 56 cm.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

"Berthe Morisot's uniqueness," wrote Paul Valéry, "was to live her painting and to paint her life, as if this was a natural and necessary process essential to her wellbeing… She took a paint brush, set it down, and picked it up again, the same way we grasp an idea, let it go, then reconsider it." (P. Valéry, *Ecrits sur l'art*, *op. cit.*, p. 147). Already in her youth, Berthe had chosen contemporary life as the fundamental theme of her work. Her subjects, however, were not as varied as those of Degas; she limited herself to the private circle of a Parisian woman. Every moment in her own family life was a subject for her work. Without her sisters, nephews, daughter, and husband, there would be no Berthe Morisot paintings. Her sister Edma, who was also her best friend, was the one that appeared most often in her canvases. In 1867, in the Norman village of Petites Dalles, Berthe painted *Reading* or *The Green Parasol* (Cleveland, The Cleveland Museum of Art), which depicts Edma seated on the green grass reading. A parasol lies within her reach to one side; on the other side is a fan. The violet on her fashionable hat strikes a high note in the range of greens. A pleasant pastoral landscape forms the background of the painting. Yet Berthe fails to analyse the effect of changing light on the colour. The greens in her landscapes are always rather uniform; in her method of painting, her eye fails to register the subtle distinctions between various shades of a single green as in the painting of Monet. Nevertheless, around this time, her palette did become as light as that of the other Impressionists.

The dreamy portrait of Edma holding a fan near a window overlooking a perceptible urban landscape (*The Artist's Sister at a Window,* Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) was painted in 1869. Edma's white dress with pale blue shading shines in the dimly lit interior. In the first

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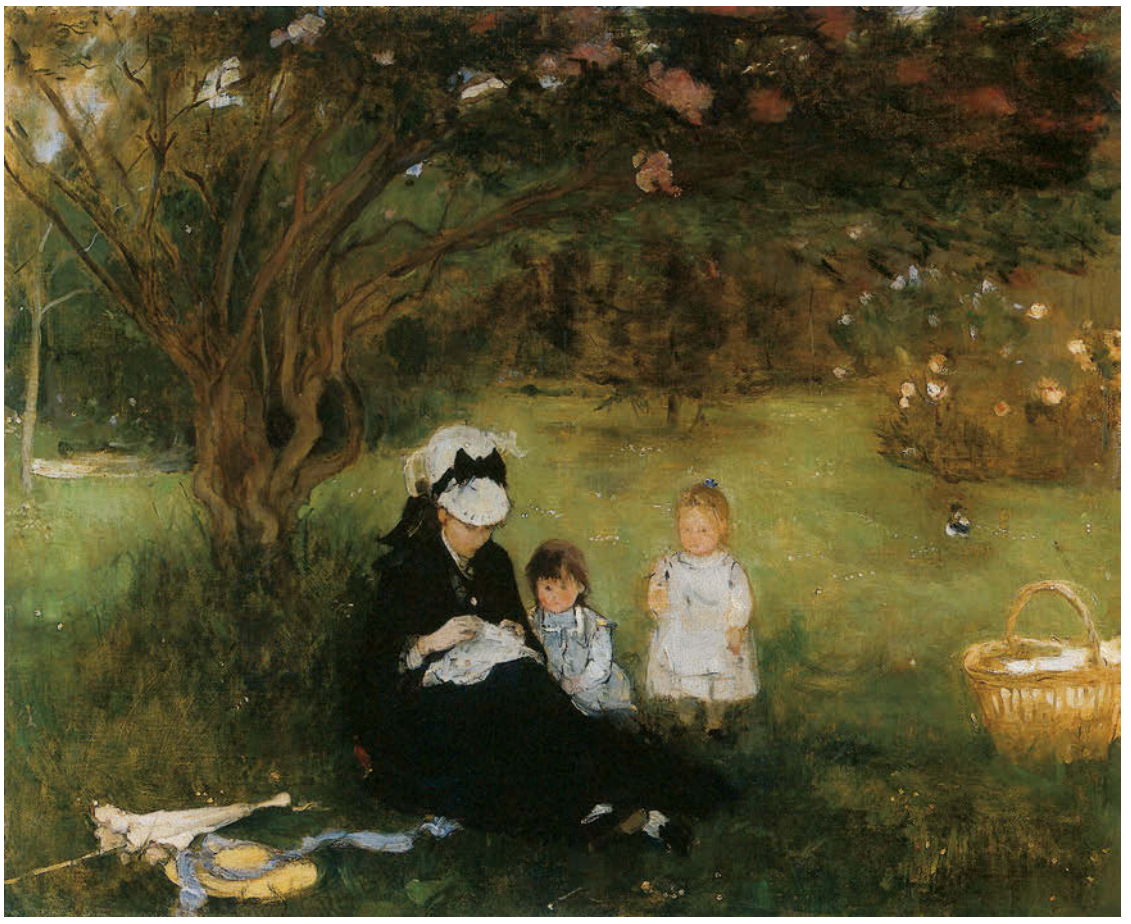
Impressionist exhibition at Nadar's studio, Morisot showed *The Cradle* (p. 244). The seated figure of Edma is depicted bent over the cradle of her second daughter, Blanche. In true Impressionist fashion, Berthe analyses the nuances of white: there are pink tones on the cradle's muslin, blue and golden tones on the window curtain. The first Impressionist exhibition also included Morisot's *Hide and Seek* (private collection), which depicts Edma with the same green parasol and green violet. This composition may be considered the archetype of numerous paintings executed by Berthe from 1874 onwards, in which Berthe created her own private universe. The mother and child, or young women with children in a garden, surrounded by the tranquil countryside of Normandy or the Ile-de-France became her constant motifs in works such as *Chasing Butterflies* (p. 246); *Lilacs at Maurecourt* (private collection); and *In the Grass* (Paris, Petit Palais – Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris).

At the same time, Berthe was exhibiting pastels and watercolours. In these techniques she achieved definite success. The large portrait of Edma in a black dress with a background of white fabric decorated with delicate colour motifs is the work of a true master (*Portrait of Madame Pontillon*, Paris, Louvre). But the charm of Berthe's work is most evident in watercolours, such as *The Artist's Sister, Edma, with Her Daughter, Jeanne* (Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art) and *On the Sofa* (Stockholm, Nationalmuseum). In these works she lays down a light, transparent layer of paint. Blue, pink, and gold reflections shimmer off the whiteness. It is an effect obtained through her style reminiscent of a sketch. The watercolour seems to run over the paper by itself. Berthe leaves some white space, and as she freely executes her casual brushwork she obtains the unfinished look of the Impressionists. The watercolour known as *Woman and Child on a Balcony* (p. 248) was painted in 1870s. Edma and Berthe's four-year-old niece Paule served as models. A panorama of Berthe's beloved Paris, including the Champ-de-Mars and the dome of the church of the Invalides, forms the background of the painting. The transparency and variety of black, the softness of the light, a skilful red note, the little touches of flowers in the urn – all contribute to make this a small masterpiece. Another category preferred by Berthe depicted scenes from women's everyday life: young women doing their hair, reading, sewing, or looking at themselves in the mirror. Generally speaking, these works are small genre scenes in the spirit of Degas, one of Berthe's favourite painters. In the second Impressionist exhibition, she showed the painting known as *At the Ball* (Paris, Musée Marmottan). The model in a ball gown holding a fashionable fan is a young woman of the Paris society Berthe knew well. The painting is essentially a salon portrait, but it is remarkable in its pictorial style: loose, reminiscent of a sketch, and with beautiful



Berthe Morisot,
Beneath the Lilac at Maurecourt, 1874.
Oil on canvas, 50 x 61 cm.
Private collection.

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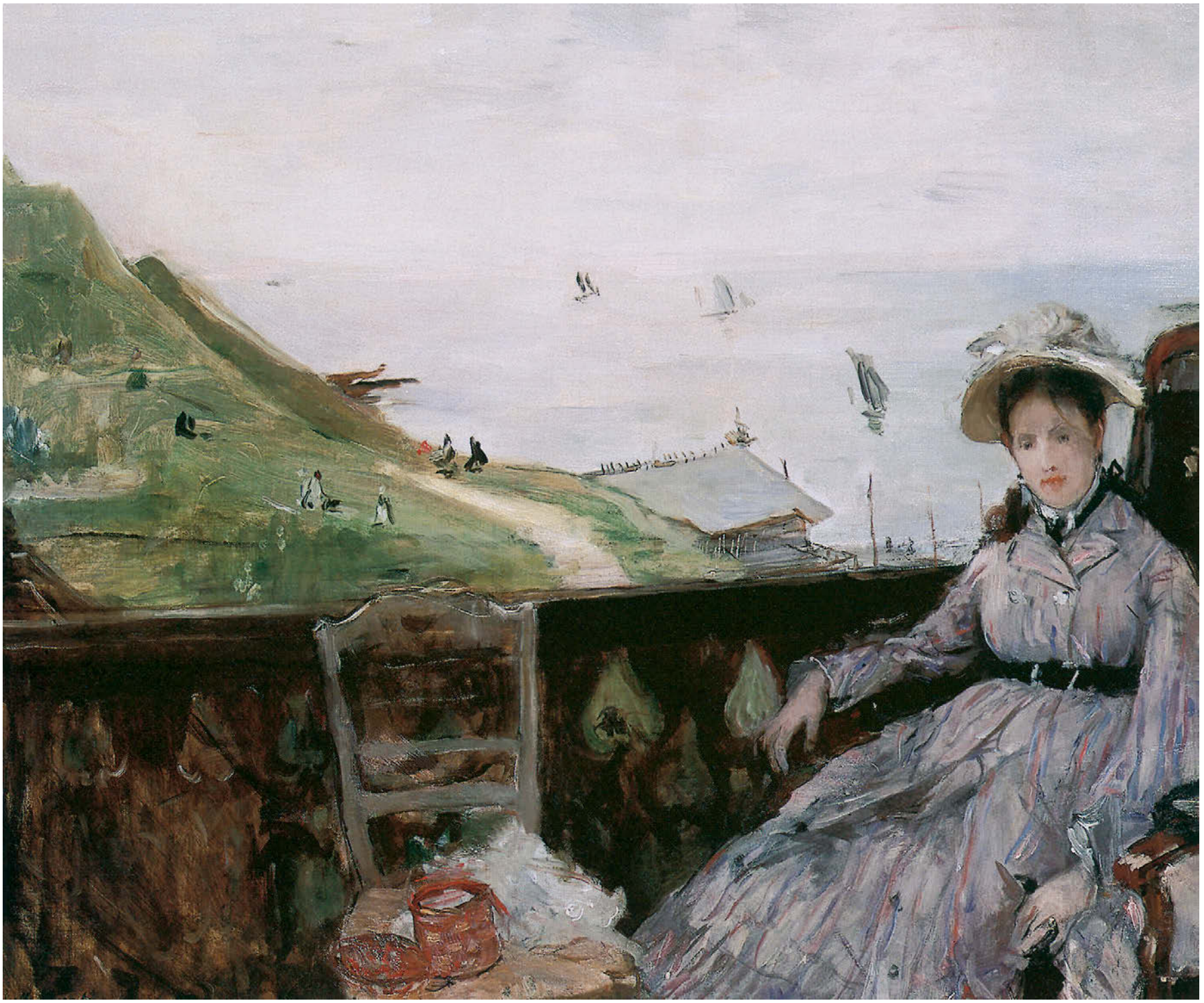

colour effects in the white areas. Berthe's *Young Woman Powdering Herself* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) and the *Woman at her Toilette* (Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago) are closer to the Impressionist works of Degas. The model, shown with her back turned to the spectator and in profile, and the pleasant disarray of a woman's boudoir, translate the charm of this intimate world that only a woman can know. The critics who noted the specifically feminine charm of Morisot's work were correct. The second Impressionist exhibition also showed a painting that amounted to Morisot's own *Luncheon on the Grass*. In his painting, Edouard Manet had painted his brother Eugène in a situation that contemporaries found inappropriate. Now Berthe made her husband the central figure of her painting, which depicted something of a society picnic. Some Morisot biographers see in this painting the image of ideal family life as she saw it. Ever

Berthe Morisot,

Woman and Child on a Balcony, 1871-1872.

Private collection.

Berthe Morisot,

On the Terrace, 1874.

Oil on canvas, 65.5 x 73 cm.

Tokyo Fuji Art Museum, Tokyo.

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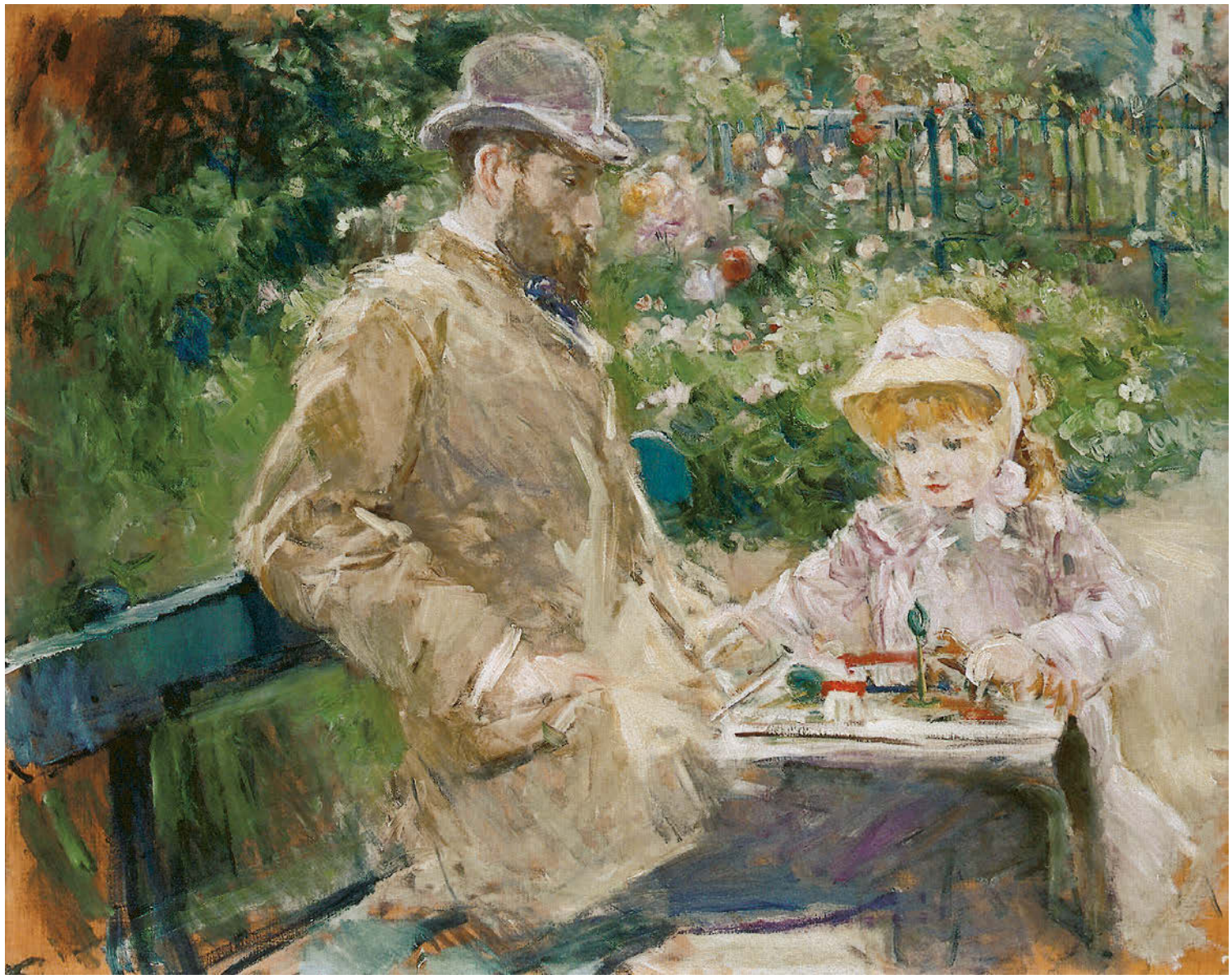

since he married Berthe, Eugène had become her constant model. In 1878, their daughter Julie was born, which explains the lack of Berthe's paintings in the third and fourth Impressionist exhibitions. Now Julie too became her model. We can see the little girl grow taller and mature in her mother's paintings, where she is depicted playing with her father, drawing in the garden, embroidering with her friends, playing with a doll. In fact, Morisot had an astonishing gift for expressing her own feelings through her painting with complete sincerity and spontaneity. Beginning in the late 1870s, Morisot's pictorial style changed noticeably. Her brush strokes lengthened and became much more nervous and are applied in different ways. This created the impressionistic vibration of colour and light that was previously absent in her painting. In *Summer Day* (London, The National Gallery), she successfully created a natural harmony between the landscape and the female figures in a boat. Pictorial expression through the use of broken brush strokes enabled Berthe to render the transparency of light and air. This painting is the closest Morisot comes to the work of Monet and Renoir, yet the society tone that often characterises her work is recognisable here, as well. At the same time, all the paintings depicting Eugène Manet and her daughter, such as *Eugène Manet and his Daughter at Bougival* (p. 250); *Eugène Manet and his Daughter in the Garden* (p. 251), have a natural charm and unpretentiousness.

Berthe Morisot,
Eugène Manet and his Daughter at Bougival, 1881.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm.
Musée Marmottan, Paris.

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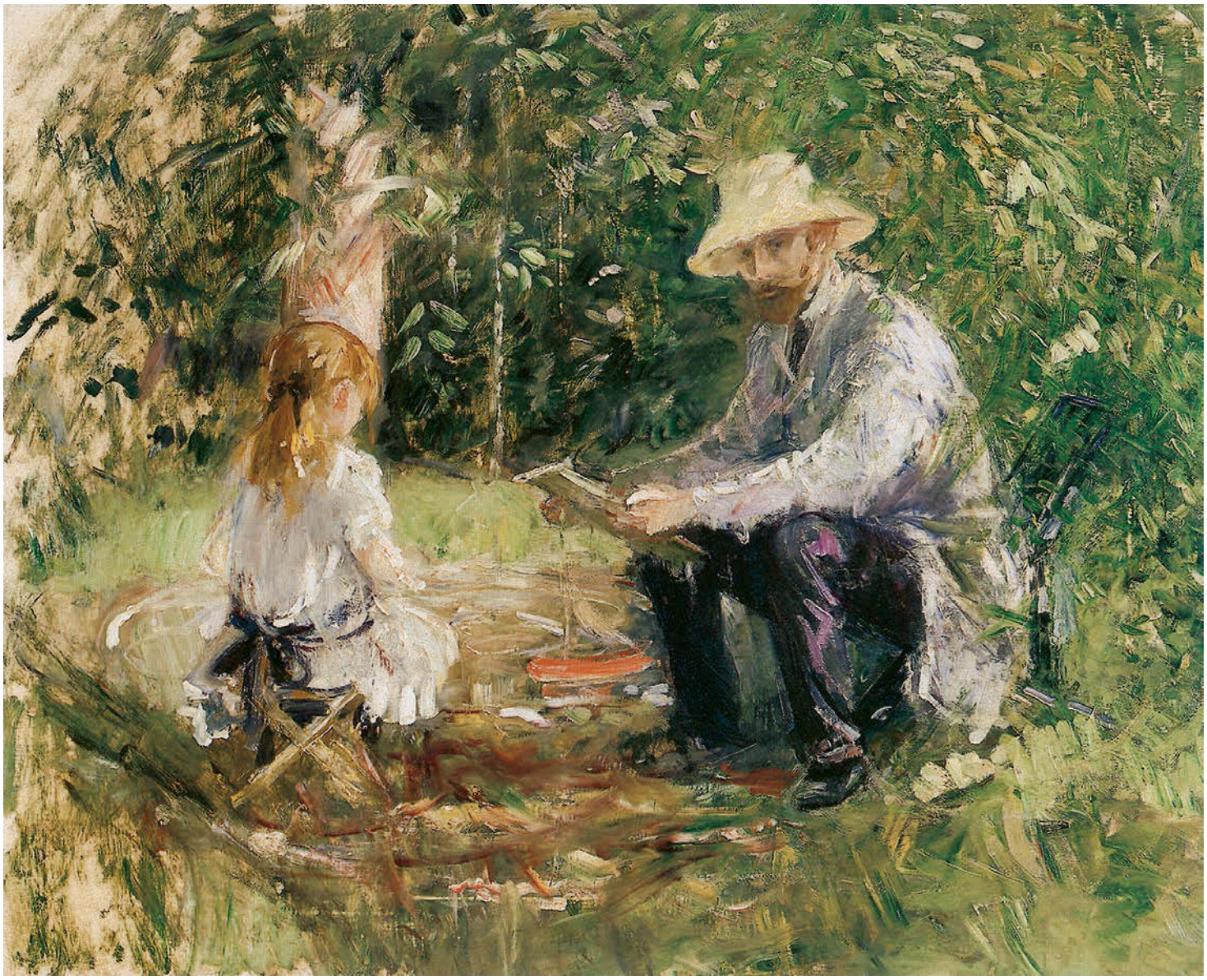

On 28 December 1879, Edouard Manet gave his sister-in-law an easel. “My dear Berthe,” he wrote, “don’t be surprised by the arrival of a new type of easel that is very handy for pastels; it’s my humble New Year’s gift.” (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 100). The gift was symbolic: the newborn, Julie, was eighteen months and it seemed that maternal duties might detract from artistic occupations. Berthe was in fact completely absorbed by her daughter, whom friends had named Bibi. Berthe thought she bore a resemblance to Edouard Manet: “Mine is a Manet through and through; she already looks like her uncles, nothing like me.” (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 99). And although Julie seemed less pretty than her nephews, she wrote to Edma’s daughter: “my little Bibi is much less ugly in reality than in her photograph and sweet as can be… She so loves to laugh and play! She’s like a little cat, always cheerful; she’s round as a ball with little eyes that sparkle and a big mouth that frowns.” (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 100). In terms of Berthe’s art, her daughter was also a stimulus. Julie was naturally part of the household’s circle of friends, whose children formed lifelong friendships. As Jean Renoir relates the words of his father: “The Manet circle at the time of Berthe Morisot was an authentic centre of Parisian civilisation… One didn’t meet intellectuals at Berthe Morisot’s, simply people who provided good company. Mallarmé was a regular

Berthe Morisot,
Eugène Manet and his Daughter in the Garden, 1883.
Oil on canvas, 60 x 73 cm.
Private collection.

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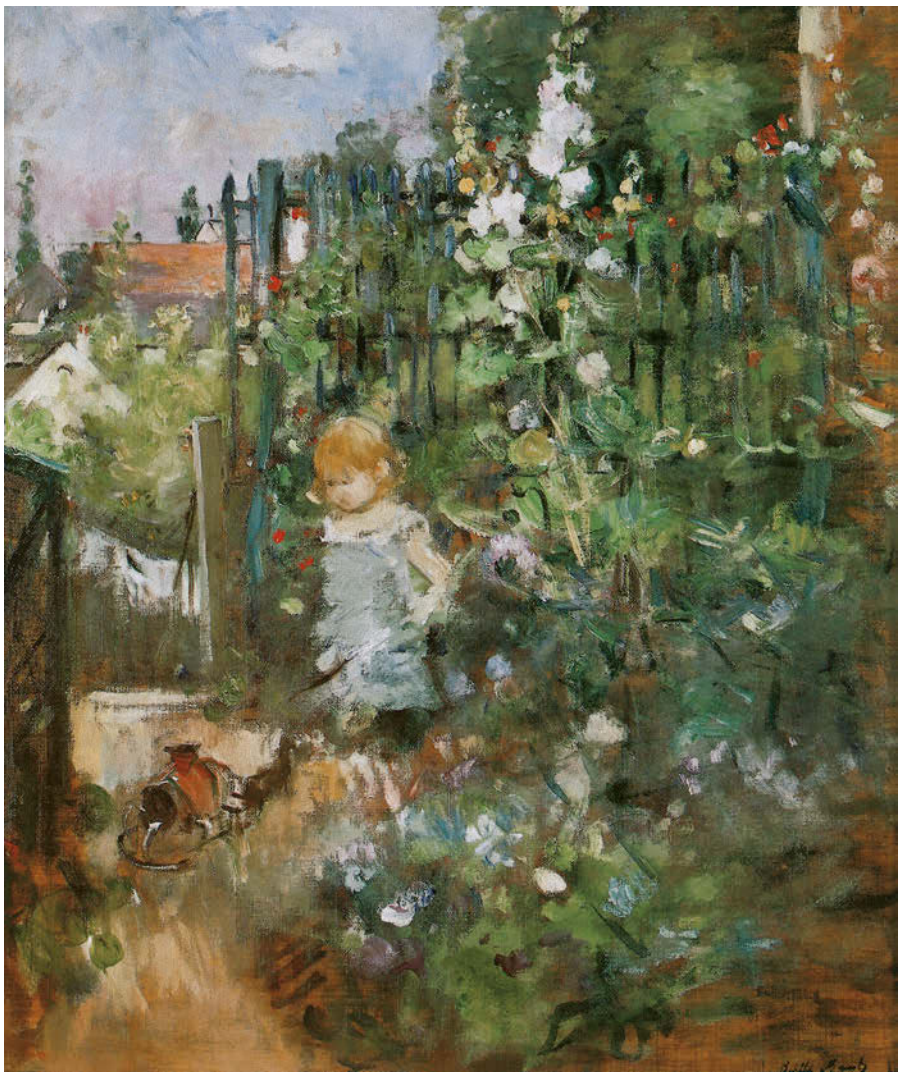
at the house. Berthe Morisot liked a particular type. She only attracted quality. She had the gift of smoothing edges. Next to her, even Degas became gracious." (J. Renoir, *op. cit.*, p. 333-334).

As he did for his other friends, Mallarmé sent letters to Berthe with an address in rhymed verse: "Apporte ce livre quand naît / Sur le Bois l'Aurore amarante / Chez Madame Eugène Manet / Rue au loin Villejust quarante." (When the red dawn breaks over the wood, take this book to Madame Eugène Manet at 40, rue Villejust) (D. Bona, *op. cit.*, p. 255). Julie, too, on more than one occasion received elegant and witty gifts of verse from Mallarmé: "*Sur Pégase si bien en selle / Où que vous jette son élan / Restez Bibi, Mademoiselle / Julie, avec le nouvel an.*" (Firmly in the saddle on Pegasus, wherever your enthusiasm takes you, stay Bibi, Mademoiselle Julie, in the New Year) (D. Bona, *op. cit.*, p. 265). Julie was depicted in drawings and paintings by Edouard Manet, Degas, and Renoir. The family lived in Bougival for two years in a house surrounded by a park. When Edouard Manet was gravely ill at Rueil, they were able to visit him often. His death was a terrible blow for Berthe, who never stopped mourning. Given that Eugène's diseased lungs required fresh country air, it was necessary to spend a lot of time in the Mediterranean region, in Normandy, and the outskirts of Paris. In 1887, they rented a villa in the village of Mézy, near Mantes, not far from Monet's Giverny. Renoir came to Berthe's house in Mézy to introduce his wife and firstborn son to her. On the outskirts of the village, Berthe and Eugène discovered the chateau of Mesnil, which they bought in 1891. However, Berthe only lived there a short while and after her death, it became Julie's residence. In 1892, Eugène Manet died. He had always helped Berthe. Together, they had gone around to the painters to assemble the works for the last Impressionist exhibition in 1886, with Berthe's family providing a considerable portion of the financing. In 1893, Morisot painted a portrait of her daughter with her dog in an interior: *Julie Manet and her Greyhound Laërte* (p. 240). The beauty of this freely painted work illustrates the artist's maturity and mastery. Berthe was the only one who could see Julie in this way: serious and dreamy, simultaneously modest and self-confident. On 2 March 1895, Berthe died of influenza. She found the strength, just before passing, to write a few lines for Julie, who was then seventeen: "My little Julie, I love you as I'm dying; I will love you even when I've gone; I beg you, don't cry…Work and be good as you've always been; you never caused me any sadness in your little life" (*Correspondance de Berthe Morisot*, *op. cit.*, p. 184).



Edouard Manet,
Eugène Manet on the Isle of Wight, 1875.
Oil on canvas, 38 x 46 cm.
Musée Marmottan, Paris.

Renoir was painting en plein-air with Cézanne in Aix when he received the telegram announcing the death of Berthe Morisot. He put away his things and went directly to the train station. "I had the impression of being all alone in a desert," he told his son. And, even though Renoir, Degas, and Monet still had a long life ahead of them, upon the death of Berthe Morisot the group of Impressionists started to fade away.

Berthe Morisot,
Child in the Rose Garden, 1881.
Oil on canvas, 50 x 42 cm.
Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne.

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Just before his death, Claude Monet wrote: “I’m still sorry to have been the cause of the name given to this group, most of whom were not in the least bit impressionistic”. Starting with this paradox – an ensemble that saw itself as a coherent group, while affirming artistic individuality as the ultimate goal – the author, Nathalia Brodskaïa, explores the contradictions of late nineteenth-century art.

Was it not Manet who evoked the definitive formula: “I paint what I see and not what others want to see” ? There would be a long way to go before the world recognised the difference between traditional, academic art and the birth of modern, non-figurative painting.

After analysing the essential elements of the Impressionist movement, Nathalia Brodskaïa pursues, across the œuvre of each of the main players, the search for “that conviction they had, of justice in their principles and value in their art”.

From this assertion of difference, modern painting was born.

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